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MEMENTO meMORlam: Reconciling Death, Society, and the Environment

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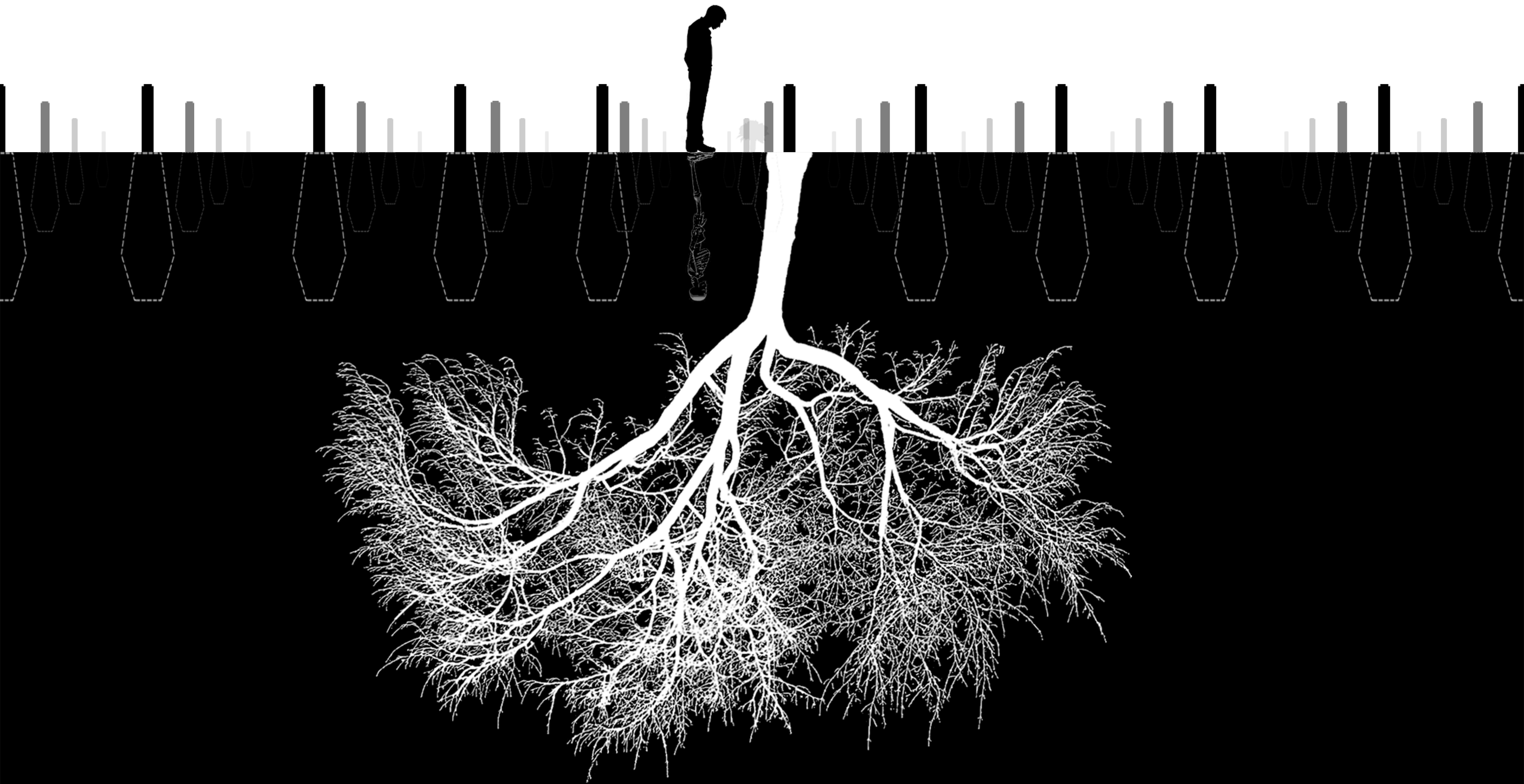


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MEMENTO MEMORIAM

RECONCILING DEATH, SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

MEMENTO MEMORIAM

This Final Project is Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Architecture

By

DAMARI WEAVER

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree

BACHELOR OF ARCHITECTURE

Kennesaw State University

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Department of Architecture
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Title:
MEMENTO MEMORIAM

Thesis Statement:

The increase in population, rising cost of funeral expenses, and environmental “permanence” of cemeteries has increased the burden of modern American burial practices. In order to reconcile the various physical, environmental and psychological challenges of death, the architecture of death-related practices must propose sustainable alternatives of honoring and “housing” the dead, while creating a supportive environment that assists in the mourning experience.

Student Signature | Date

Primary Advisor: Kathryn Bedette | Date

Secondary Advisor: Mine Hashas-Degertekin | Date

Thesis Coordinator | Date

Department Chair | Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to thank:

My Mom, for everything she's done for me, too numerous to name

My Family, for their unending support

My Advisors, for their guidance and belief in my project

My Friends, for making these the best five years of my life

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The two most important moments in our existence are our birth and our death. Both are sublime in that they impress upon the mind a sense of grandeur and miracle. And both are in their own way, beautiful. And while life has been repeatedly venerated, death has been too often thrown to the wayside, a taboo that should only be spoken of in hush tones or ignored entirely. But we can't ignore it. It's unknown, it's final and when it comes, it's unexpected. Many of our ancestors practiced different methods of honoring the dead, from mummification to sky burials. Life was short and fragile, and death was at its most prevalent. As technology advanced and hygienic practices improved, the distance between life and death lengthened, and we became comfortable with the idea of living, and only living.

Here lies the problem. We've grown comfortable ignoring the painful truth of death in favor of the beautiful lie of perpetual life. When death finality rears its ugly skull, there is an inability to cope stemming from denial and unpreparedness of this brutal reality. Consequently, thousands of dollars are spent embellishing the grieving process with elaborate coffins, processions, and headstones in an attempt to immortalize the dead: an edifice to our hubris. This notion is reflected in our spaces as well. Funeral homes sell and promote these ideas and acres of land are dedicated to "housing" the deceased, populated with large, granite stones, reinforcing this notion of "forever". But this is a proxy for reality. In less than 5 years, America's largest cemetery will reach its capacity, while our population will continue to grow, making traditional burial an increasingly burdensome option.

My hope, is to ease this burden. **In order to reconcile the various physical, environmental, financial and psychological challenges of death, the architecture of death-related practices must propose sustainable alternatives of honoring and "housing" the dead.** It must create a supportive environment that assists in the mourning experience and helps foster thoughts of remembrance, and goes beyond the physical function of a cemetery, or a crematorium, or a columbarium, by focusing on architecture's subliminal nature to heal, orient, and evoke.

Memento Mori. Latin. - "remember you must die." A sentiment we all know to be true. Let's see if we can find a better way to do it.

FIG. 01



Have you ever noticed...?

When perusing major cities in Google Maps, you're struck with the occasional pocket of greenery in a sea of concrete and steel, a stark comparison in the most urban of environments. However occasionally, this pocket won't be a park - winding paths through endless greenery. Sometimes it's covered in stones - large steles laid in a gridded formation. Sometimes it's not a small pocket at all, but a vast sea of grass and granite, a glaring contrast from the blocks adjacent. No aspect of this land is easily defined as "building", but it has permanent "residents" numbering in the hundreds and counting. This occurrence alone is interesting. Cemeteries are an elusive space in that they arguably alter the urban fabric by acting as de-activators, spaces that no one "wants" to go to, and in fact, may even stray away from. Even though they draw similarities to notions of parks and public spaces, we don't gather or meet-up in them except for specific purposes. A majority of the time, they are empty; I've never seen another person in a cemetery. I spent my 5th grade semester at my neighborhood school, East Lake Elementary, and what struck me most about the school was that it was built on the leftover space

of East View Cemetery, right on the corner, as though it wasn't suppose to be there. Tombstones separated from playgrounds by a thin chain-link. What's more intriguing was how opposed I was to it. Most people wouldn't want to build so close to such a space unless forced to. It wouldn't really be considered prime real estate. In my mind, it was the clash of a sacred space with a "daily" space that I found illogical. This realization sparked even more questions about the idea of sanctity, the "purity of program", and how we perceive death. It puts my mortality into perspective and forces me to confront it, or ignore it entirely. Many young adults haven't been confronted with death. I've never experience the death of a close loved-one, a friend or even a pet (other than aquatic animals) and question how ready I am for this inevitability. How ready is anybody? Cemeteries are a small attempt to prepare us. Reminding us of our future but imparting itself in our present. Over the years, these notions have been challenged, defended and altered and my attempt to understand and expound on them, only adds to the centuries-old discourse led by philosophers, theologians, laymen, writers, artists, architects and intellectuals alike.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF DEATH



FIG. 02

Death is a looming presence in our lives. It's something we can never eliminate, only postpone. It grounds us in a reality that we all share: the impermanence of life and the struggle to find our purpose in it.

However, in reality, these existential inquiries only affect the living causing grief, sadness, fear, financial burdens, psychological stress and deteriorations of one's well-being. While the number of problems associated with death are intangible and unavoidable (emotionally), there are a few key aspects of death that can be solved, especially within the death industry:

- 1. The lack of sustainable burial practices**
- 2. The ever increasing costs of funerals**
- 3. The stigma and taboos of death in American society**



PHYSICAL
-ENVIRONMENT
-BODY






FINANCIAL
-DEATH CUSTOMS
-ACCOMMODATIONS












PSYCHOSOCIAL
-CULTURE
-RELIGION
-REGION

FACTORS




MODERN BURIAL
-PLACING ENCASED BODY IN GROUND  





CREMATION
-BURNING REMAINS 







COSTS
-CASKET  
-BURIAL PLOT  
-FUNERARY/CREMATION SERVICES 
-HEADSTONE  
-AVERAGING \$7,000 - \$10,000  

“AMERICAN”
-WESTERN IDEALS 
-JUDEO-CHRISTIAN 
-CAPITALISM  
-CULTURAL IDENTITIES 
-DEMOGRAPHICS  




ISSUES




UNSUSTAINABLE
-CO₂ EMISSIONS 
-INORGANIC CHEMICALS 
-ENVIRONMENTAL PERMANENCE  


UNECESSARY
-OPPULENT  
-EXPLOITS CUSTOMERS 
-COMMODIFIED THE DEATH INDUSTRY 


TABOO
-FRIGHTENING  
-EVIL/OCCULTIC 
-LITTLE DIALOG ABOUT DEATH  
-LACK OF MORTALITY SALIENCE 



SOLUTIONS

PROVIDE SPACE TO REMEDY THE CHALLENGES OF POST-DEATH PRACTICES   

PROPOSE SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES TO MODERN BURIAL AND CREMATION   

ELIMINATE THE COMMODIFICATION OF DEATH PRACTICES 

REDUCE THE PRICE OF DEATH CUSTOMS 

REDUCE STIGMA SURROUNDING DEATH AND SHED LIGHT ON ITS IMPORTANCE IN LIFE.  

1. IT'S UNSUSTAINABLE!

The burial process is more complex than one may think. At its simplest, it requires putting a dead body in the ground, but with funeral homes pushing more lavish options, the result of many burials is more harm to the environment.

Many carcinogenic chemicals (mainly formaldehyde) are used if one decides to embalm their loved one for the purpose of having an open casket. The casket (and vault if one chooses to have one installed) can often be made from expensive and rather unsustainable materials that stay in the earth basically forever.

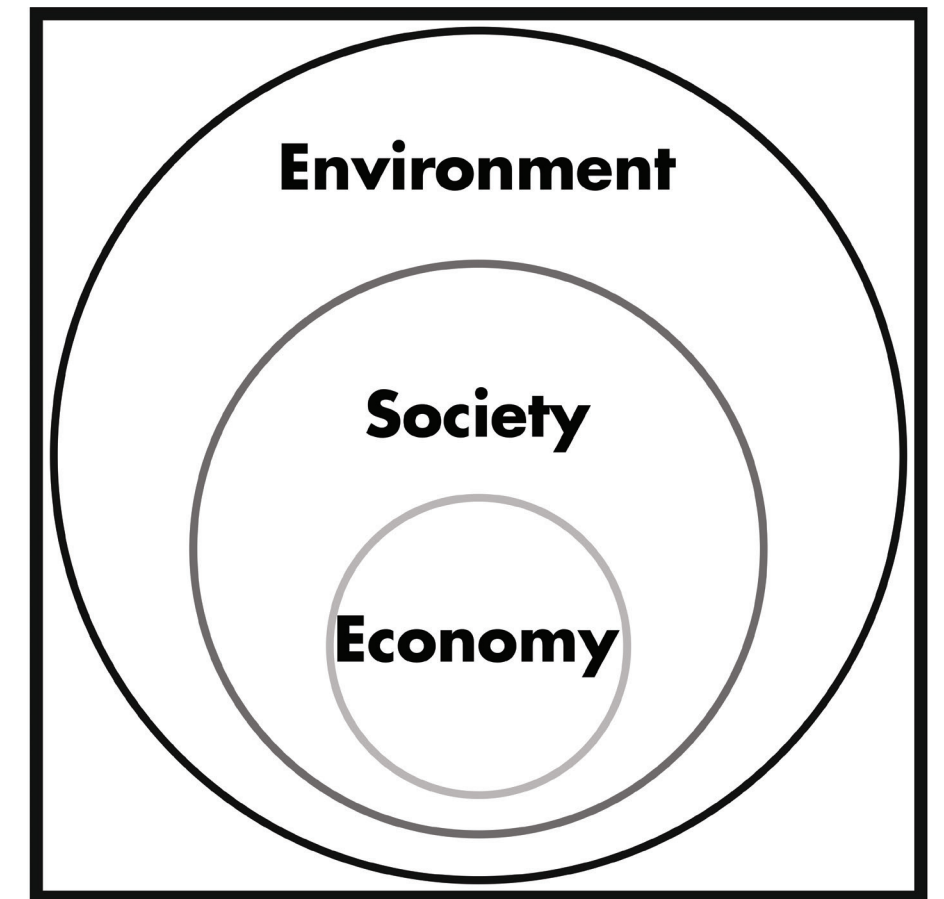
Cremation does solve these problems, but unknowingly creates more: the burning of bodies releases huge amounts of CO₂ and other off-gases if not handled correctly and the mercury from tooth fillings can leak into the ecosystem.

With the world's population constantly growing land is becoming a precious commodity. While some smaller countries have already begun implementing methods of handling their dead within the confines of limited space, America, with its billions of acres of land, is less concerned with such problems and isn't seeking to follow suit.



NESTED SUSTAINABILITY MODEL

Sustainability



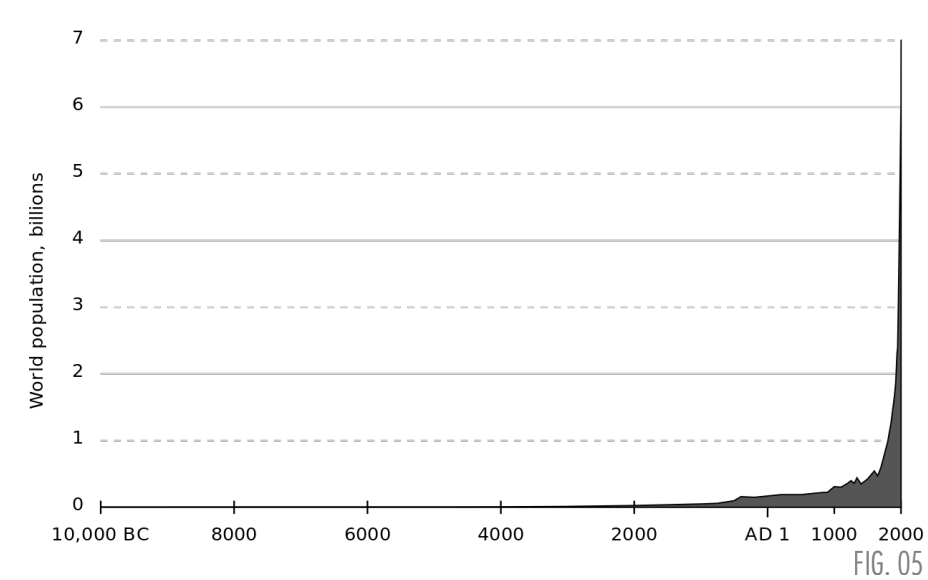
The 3-Nested-Dependencies model reflects the co-dependent reality that lies within sustainability. When a natural disaster occurs, the resulting damage becomes an environmental, societal and economical disaster. It shows that human society is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the environment—that without food, clean water, fresh air, fertile soil, and other natural resources, we cease to exist.

This is also true for making sustainability practices culturally viable. Sustainability requires a holistic approach: we must nurture and respect the environment in which we inhabit, we must educate our society about the importance of the environment, and we must always strive to make sustainable methods financially lucrative, even more so than those that taint both the environment and society at large.

WORLD POPULATION SINCE 10,000 BC

The number of people on the planet at one time is higher now than it has ever been in the history of mankind and continues to grow.

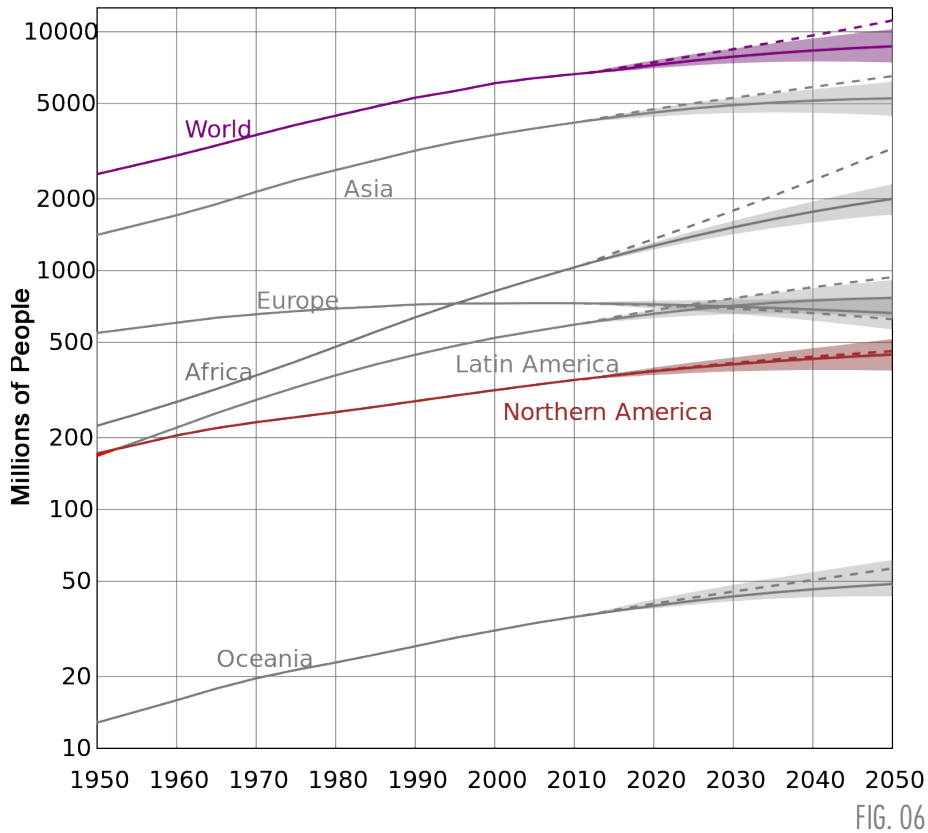
REF. 01



POPULATION GROWTH BY CONTINENT SINCE 1950

The world's population is currently 7.4 billion; it is expected to reach 11.2 billion by the start of the next century

REF. 02



POPULATION GROWTH RATE SINCE 1950

Even though the rate in which children are being born is decreasing, the improvements in medicine and hygiene, access to clean water, food and toilets allows for a longer life expectancy, particularly in developing countries .

REF. 03

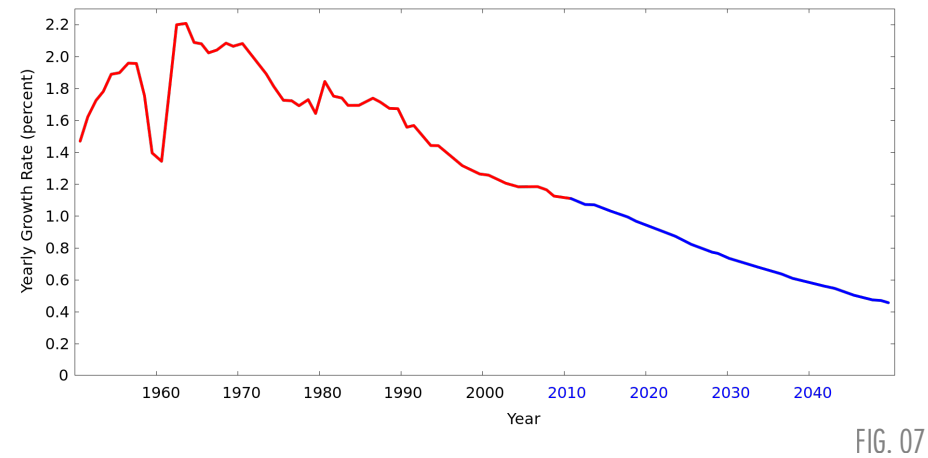
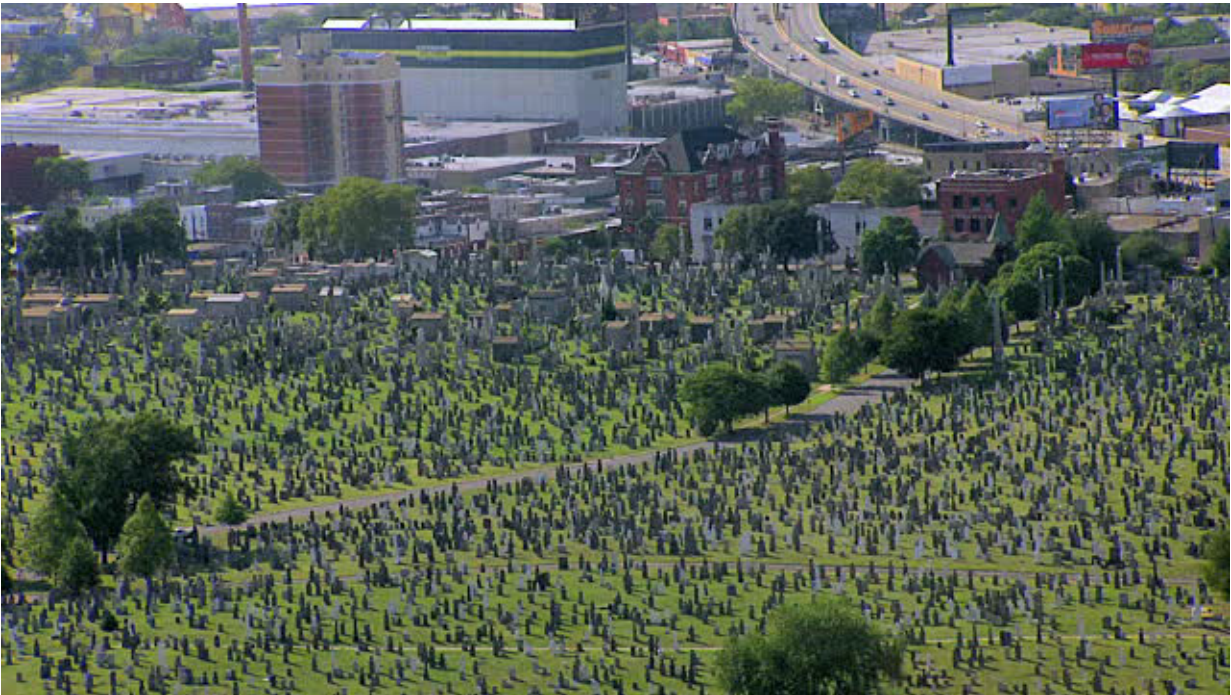


FIG. 03

Although the American way of death has become rather unsustainable and archaic, there are methods of laying the dead to rest that have come into fruition in the last few decades that hint at a better future for the planet and the deceased. The introduction of “green” or natural burials opts for carbon-free, chemical-free, and environmentally friendly burial practices that retain all the dignity of a traditional burial without the toxicity. While there aren’t many cemeteries that advertise themselves as “green”, they are increasing in number with websites dedicated to helping people find one near them.

FIG. 04



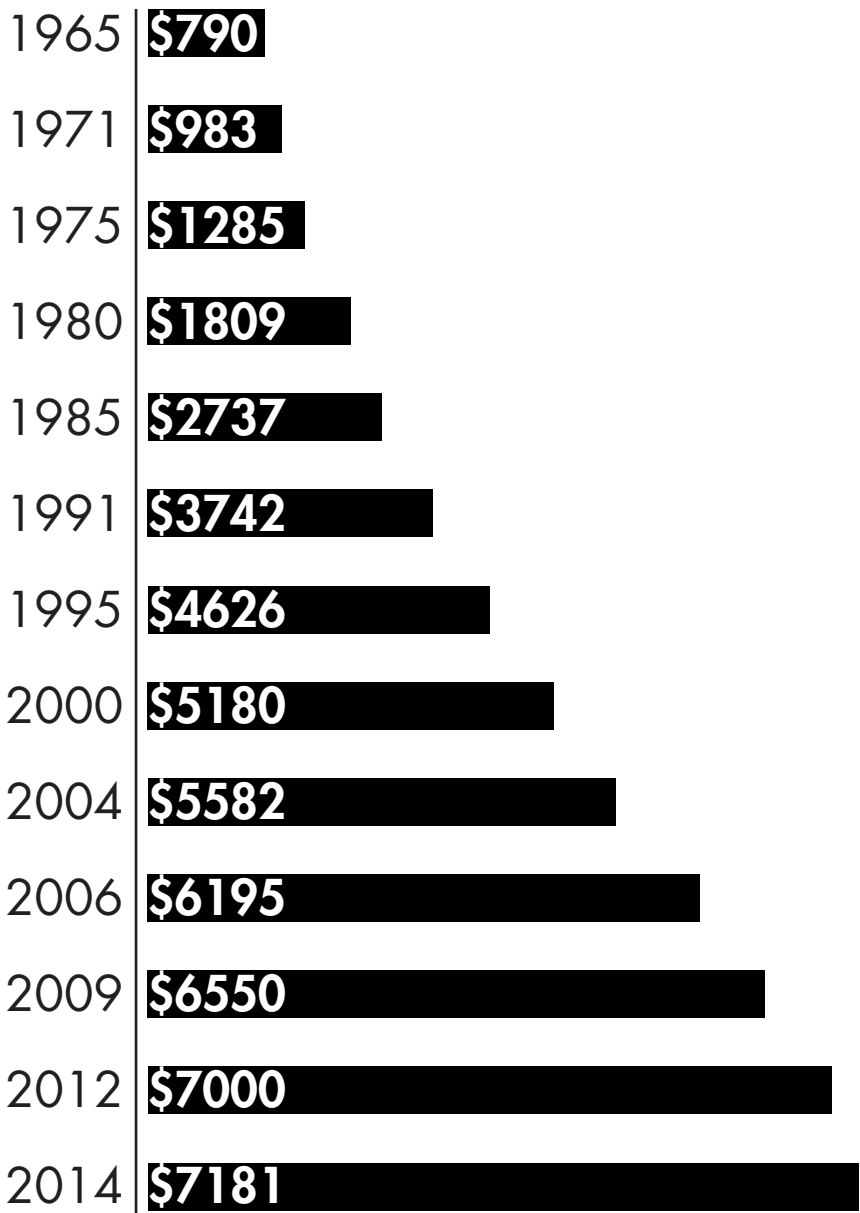
2. IT COSTS TOO MUCH!

Like any other service in America, death has become an industry in itself, making over 15 billion dollars in revenue yearly in the US. As a consequence, the price for funerary services has risen consistently every year for the past 70 years, making burial more financially burdensome, particularly for poorer families.

The industry is consistently pushing for more expensive and rather unnecessary embellishments to the funeral process that includes embalming fees, travel fees, reinforced caskets, lined vaults, funeral packages and other services/fees that increase the price of an otherwise modest ceremony.

This isn't helped by the fact that almost every funerary service is handled by the same few companies that buy up "mom and pop" funeral homes and cemeteries around the nation, creating a virtual monopoly on the industry and practically forcing the bereaved to take part in these exorbitant fees and outrageous services.

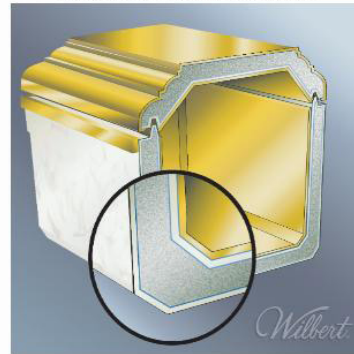
THE RISING COST OF DYING IN AMERICA (WITHOUT VAULT)



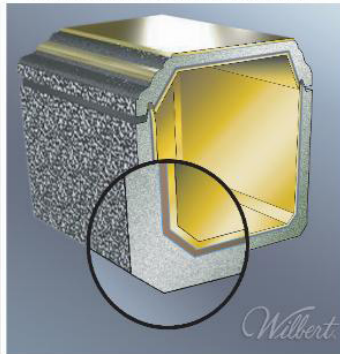
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Wilbert Offers Three Levels of Protection

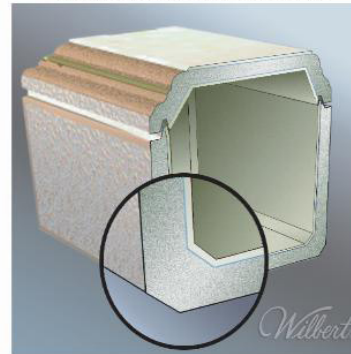
TRIPLE-REINFORCED



DOUBLE-REINFORCED



SINGLE-REINFORCED



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FIG. 08

The funerary industry's revenue is estimated to be approximately

\$15 billion

every year in the United States alone

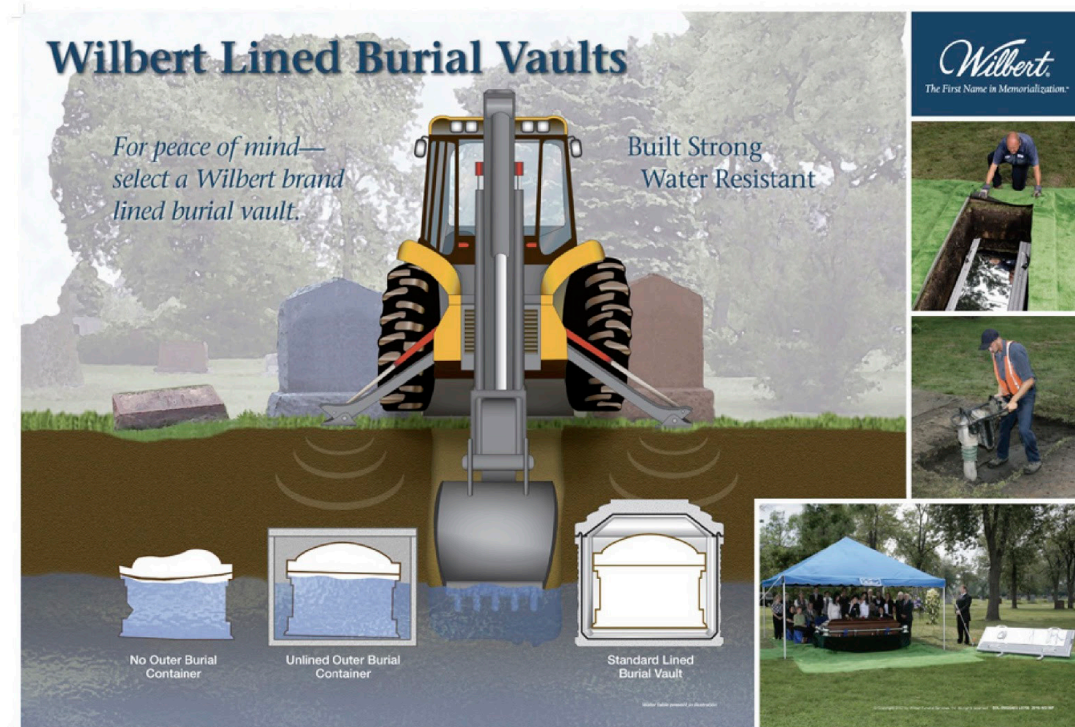


FIG. 09

MOST FUNERARY SERVICES ARE PROVIDED BY THE SAME FEW COMPANIES



FIG. 10

Hands down the largest funerary corporation in America is Service Corporation International (SCI). They use their influence to buy up competing funeral corporations in order to maintain their position at the top. In fact, this happens so frequently, that after Stewart Enterprises, the FTC forced the companies to sell 53 funeral homes and 38 cemeteries in 59 local markets, and requiring the merged company to be subject to a ten-year period in which they could no longer purchase funeral assets.



FIG. 11

The second largest funerary corporation in America, Carriage Services has managed to hold its own against the behemoth SCI, but comparing the two is like comparing the population of New York City to Los Angeles: technically Los Angeles is the second largest city in the US, but it's so far from New York City's, it's almost no contest.

HILLENBRAND

FIG. 12

Hillenbrand Inc. represents 45% of America's casket sales. They operate two subsidiaries, one of which, Batesville Casket Company, supplied funeral homes across the nation with caskets, coffins, urns and cremation containers, while their other specializes in unrelated industrial manufacturing.

3. THERE'S STILL A TABOO.

Memento mori - "remember you must die". This Latin phrase originating from the ancient Roman proverb of triumphant generals returning from battle and having their slaves remind them that in the face of their success, they are only human. Society's thoughts on death over time have fluctuated throughout the years, but remain relatively similar: there is fear of the unknown and there is comfort in its certainty but there is also God and the afterlife, the intangibles and the remains that shape how we see death today.

As always, art reflects the society within which it's produced. By charting the art, cultural artifacts and literature of multiple periods, we can begin to understand how death has played a role in the lives of those who came before us, and how it differs from the roles it will have to play today.



FIG. 13

"...for I have good hope that there is yet something remaining for the dead...some far better things for the good than for the evil."
-Plato (?429-347 BC)



FIG. 14

"Another glory awaits us in heaven and he who reaches there will not wish to even to think of earthly fame...from the first [life] to the second [death] is the natural progression."
-Francesco Petrarch (1304-74)

"What is there left for us in Death to fear? When once that pause of life has come between, 'Tis just the same as we had ever been."
-Lucretius (?94-55 BC)



FIG. 17



FIG. 16

"And yet how I should prove that death is not to be feared, I cannot well tell, seeing the whole power of nature showeth that of all things death is most fearful of..."
-Thomas Lupset (1495-1530)



FIG. 15

1200

1300

1400

1500



FIG. 18

"It is impossible that anything so natural, so necessary, and so universal as death, should ever have been designed by Providence as an evil to mankind."
-Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)



FIG. 19



FIG. 20

"He who pretends to look on death without fear lies. All men are afraid of dying, this the great law of sentient beings, without which the entire human species would soon be destroyed."
-Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78)



FIG. 21

"Death is not evil, for it liberates us from all evil..."
-Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837)



FIG. 22

"'Dying', he said to me, 'is a very dull and dreary affair.' Suddenly he smiled. 'And my advice to you is to have nothing whatever to do with it.' he added"
-Somerset Maugham (1965)

1600

1700

1800

1900

2000

ON "GREEN" BURIALS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY - A LITERATURE REVIEW

While the practice of “green” burials has been a relatively new phenomenon, the idea of casket-less burial has been in practice for millennia. Our ancestors didn’t bother with reinforced steel containers or concrete box. It wasn’t practical (nor was it available). As we’ve grown accustomed to the way in which we bury our dead, there are a group of individuals that are seeking to reclaim our burial rights by opting out of the system and performing natural burials, seeking a more intimate connection with their deceased while saving money and the environment. While the practice of burial may be ancient, the practice of natural burial in a hygienic, technologically advanced and modern society are making their way into the limelight and have raised many questions and concerns as people rediscover their burial roots.

Since these practices are fairly new and slow to adopt, especially outside Great Britain, little research has been done on how these practices affect those involved in the burial process and the research that has been done isn’t very diverse.

THE PARTICULARS

“Green” burial, put simply, is the interment of the body of a dead person in the soil in a manner that does not inhibit decomposition but allows the body to recycle naturally. The “green” movement started in the U.K., with the first natural burial site being completed in 2001. Hannah Rumble (2010) examines the proliferation of natural burials in Britain (where they originated), in which historical and cultural continuities between present and past disposal practices are compared. Using the Barton Glebe Cemetery as a case study, she argues that the role it plays is that of a physical as well as emotional landscape in which socio-spatial relations are made between emotion and remembrance and that this connection with the “natural world” can become therapeutic for the bereaved.

While many are quick to propose more sustainable methods of burial, few are eager to accept, particularly here in America. In Marisa Gonzales’ (2009) paper, *The “Green” Burial Movement: Reworking the Relationship between Death and Society*, data from the 2007 AAPR Funeral and Burial Planners Survey was analyzed, finding various links between “green” burial acceptance amongst those with higher education, higher socioeconomic standing and younger age.

FIG. 23



FIG. 24

UNCERTAINTIES

There are still some disconnects amongst post-death practices that natural burial hasn’t quite address and some that it creates. The authors (Hockey, Green, Clayden, Powell) of the study *“I Bury Boxes, Not Bodies”: Identity, Emotionality and Natural Burial* (2011) approached natural burial from an emotional standpoint, analyzing the social relationships between site managers and users, implying that there are deeper emotional implications of natural burial, as both a landscape and a practice, than in present day modern burial.

These same academics (Ibid. 2012) also question the cultural ramifications of natural burial in the present-day U.K. They explore the dichotomy between physical body disposal and memorialization and how they occur absent a delineated boundary, identifiable building, gravestone or casket. This arguably removes the landscape’s material culture and reflects layers of competing orientations towards the landscape those who practice natural burial adhere to, drawing out the ambiguities and contradictions within social practices, natural burial and the landscape.

A FUTURE NECESSITY?

The adoption of natural burial by Americans may be a soon popularized occurrence. The concept of “green” burials is slowly becoming an option for those seeking to reduce their carbon footprint, even in the afterlife, but is very far from becoming a viable option for most. The consequences of modern burial traditions, cremation, and embalming are both financial and environmental.

Following in the footsteps of as Jessica Mitford’s 1963 *The American Way of Death*, Joshua Slocum and Carlson Lisa’s *Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death* (2011) revamp the vivid accounts of corruption and abuse in the death industry by setting the crisis in a more contemporary setting, and addressing funerary issues which have yet to be resolved.

It addresses the consumer movements of the price-gouging industry and the social uprising in regards to death practices. Prominent leaders in this uprising, Joshua Slocum and Lisa Carlson expose these wrongdoings, inform consumers of their rights and include summaries of laws and regulations on a per-state basis.

Mark Harris’ *Grave Matters* (2008) follows four families conducting “green” burials, documenting their processes, expenses and experiences. There is even a guide detailing everything one needs to know to set up their own including exact costs, the contacts of many natural burial providers and local laws to abide by.

Harris’ step-by-step documentation of the natural process makes sense in this day-and-age as the act puts the burial and mourning process in the hands of the bereaved rather than external parties.



FIG. 26

FIG. 25



The increase in population, rising cost of funeral expenses, and environmental “permanence” of cemeteries has increased the burden of modern American burial practices. In order to reconcile the various *financial, environmental and psychological* challenges of death, the architecture of death-related practices must propose sustainable alternatives of honoring and “housing” the dead, while creating a supportive environment that assists in the mourning experience.

SITE : PITTSBURGH, ATLANTA



FIG. 27

The site is located on the southern edge of the Pittsburgh neighborhood in Atlanta. I chose this site because its characteristics allow me to address the key issues categorized in my thesis:

Financial - The site is located in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Atlanta, a relatively poor and underdeveloped suburb awaiting redevelopment efforts. Since burial in its current form is becoming more expensive each year, using a site within such a neighborhood helps drive my proposal to be financial viability

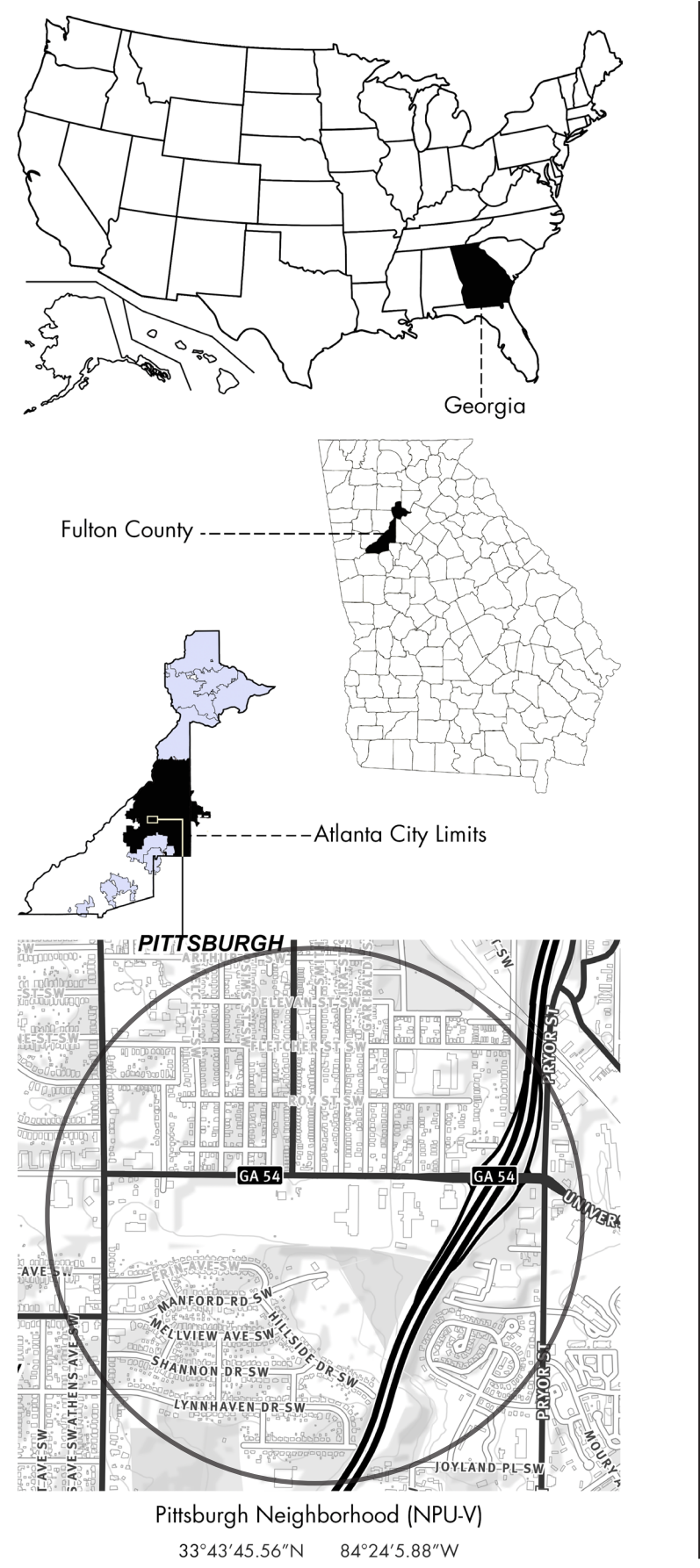
Environmental - The site is currently marked as a brownfield site, a 27.5 acre slab of concrete and asphalt and a decaying building; such a large swath of land probably creates a larger heat island effect than the surrounding areas. The introduction of "green" burial techniques can radically improve the state of the landscape through bioremediation techniques and the introduction of native flora, providing a welcoming view for residents and those entering the neighborhood's southern entry.

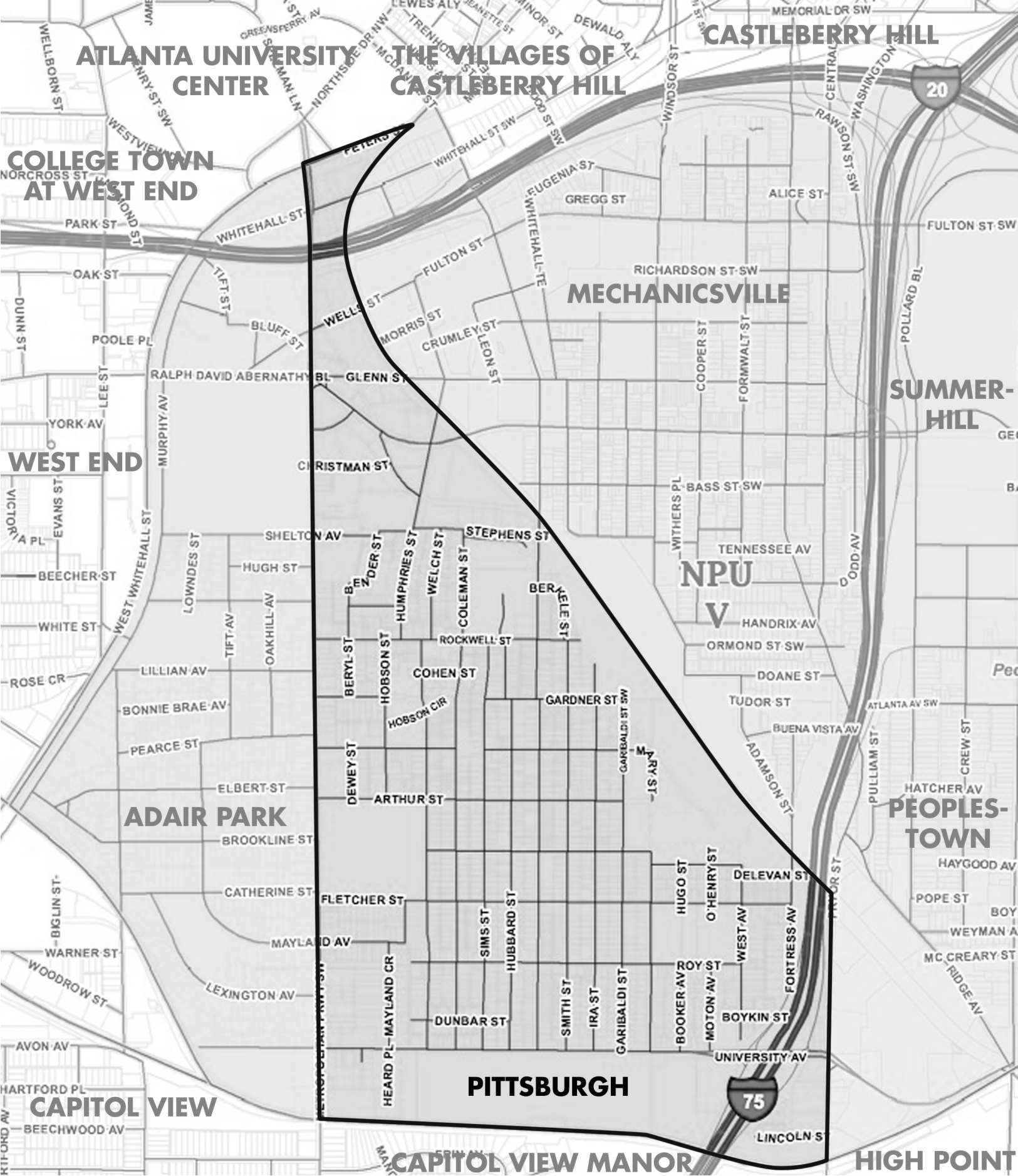
Psychological - The social stigma about death is one that seems inconsequential, but left unaddressed, it can become detrimental to our psyche. For decades, there have been rumors and hear-say surrounding death that are filled with misconceptions and myths that only further distance us from our mortality and make death the harbinger of all things 'bad'. By having a cemetery that actively addresses these issues in a public manner, it can slowly change our outlook on death towards realism, simplicity and acceptance and reintroduce the cemetery as an active part in the community.



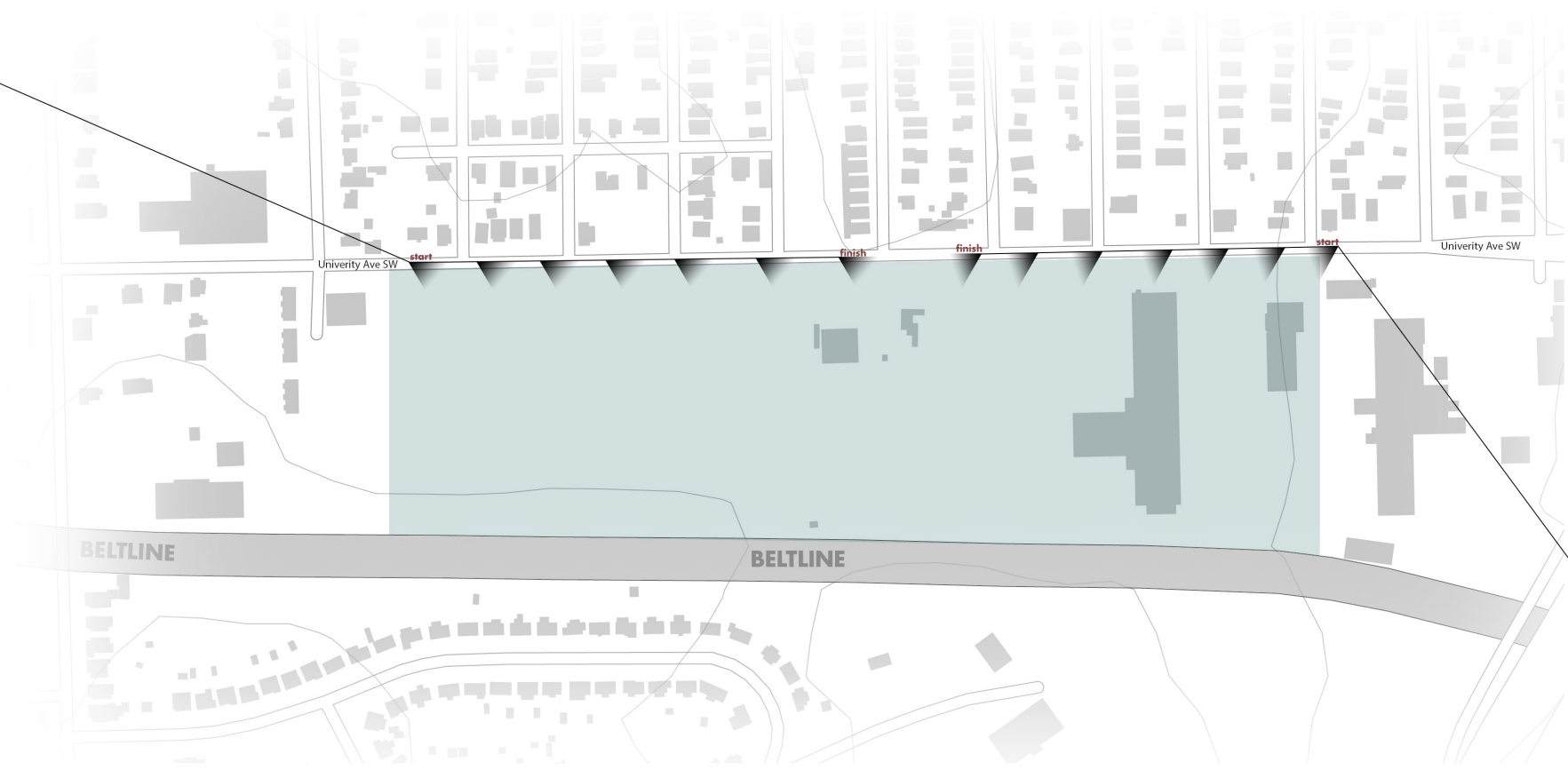


LOCATION





PROCESSION TO SITE





1

2

3

4

5

6

THE STREETS

The Pittsburgh neighborhood has had a long standing historic relevance in Atlanta. It was founded in 1883 as a black, working-class suburb alongside the Pegram rail shops, which is why the current Beltline runs across the southern boundary. It was named Pittsburgh because the industrial area reminded one of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and its famous steel mills. Pittsburgh is relatively poor and underdeveloped, with a majority of the population living on the poverty line. Many residence don't have health insurance. The crime rate in the area has also been infamous, though, many crimes are non-violent (insurance fraud, vandalism, etc.). However, as property values rise in intown Atlanta neighborhoods, many see hope that this trend will spread to Pittsburgh and bring renewal.

ZONING

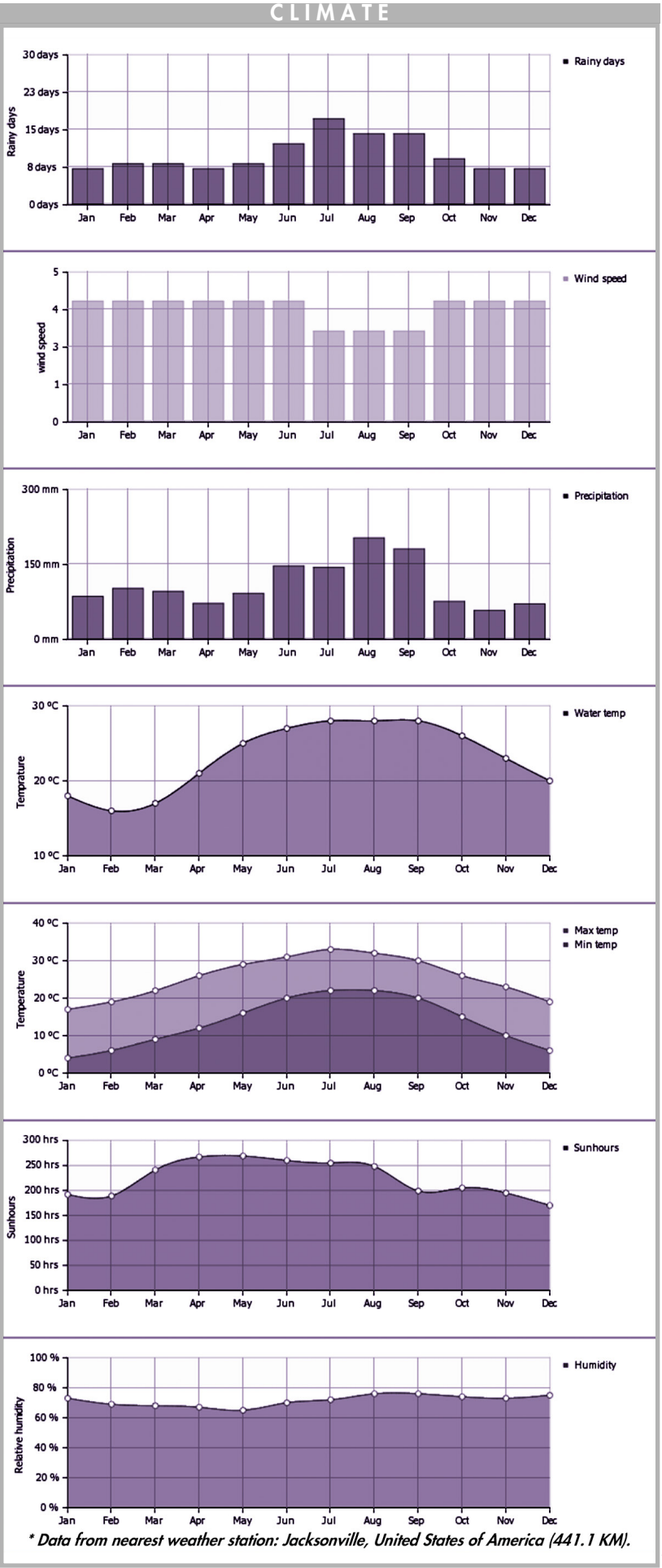
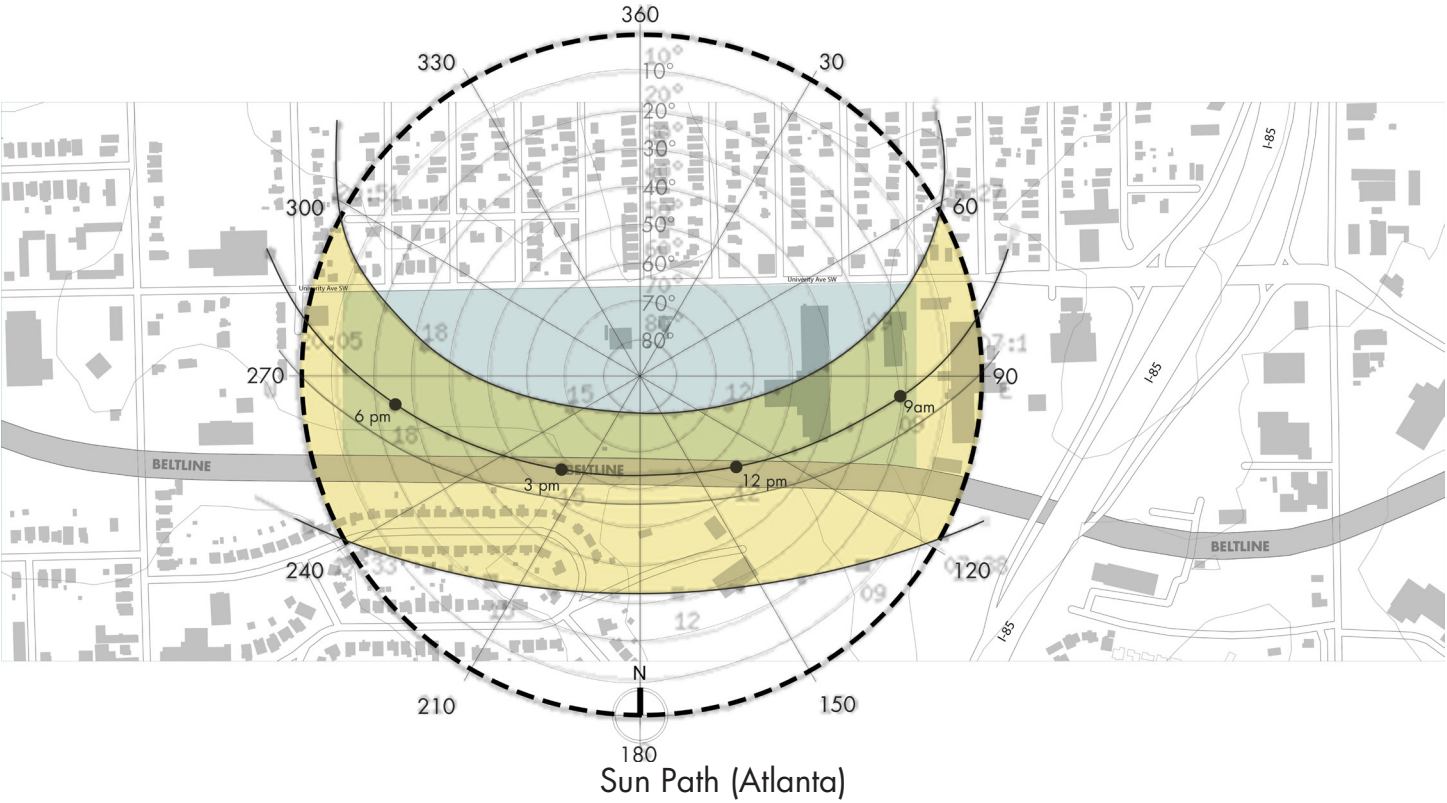
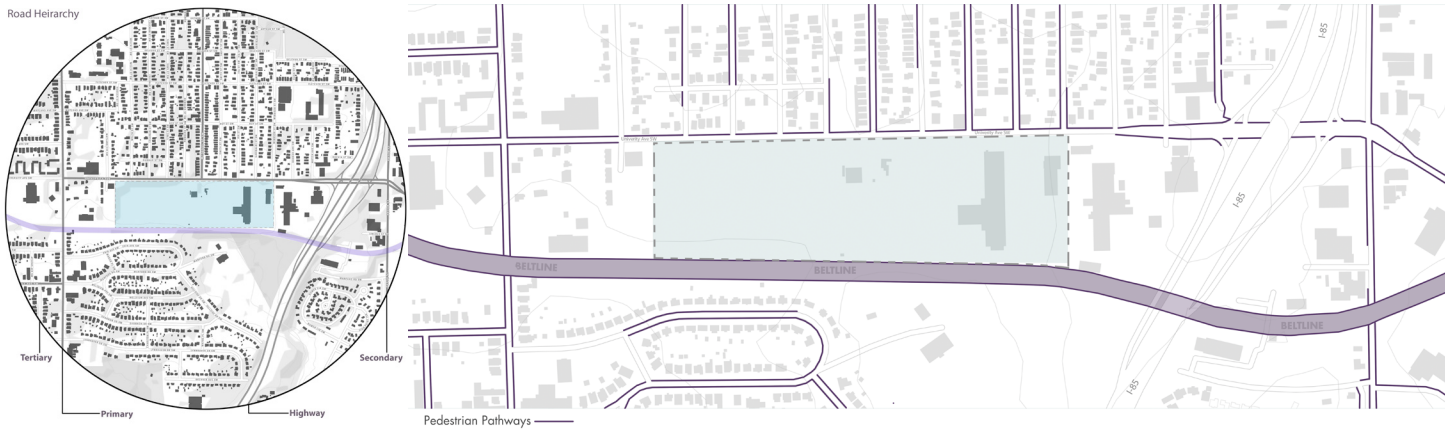
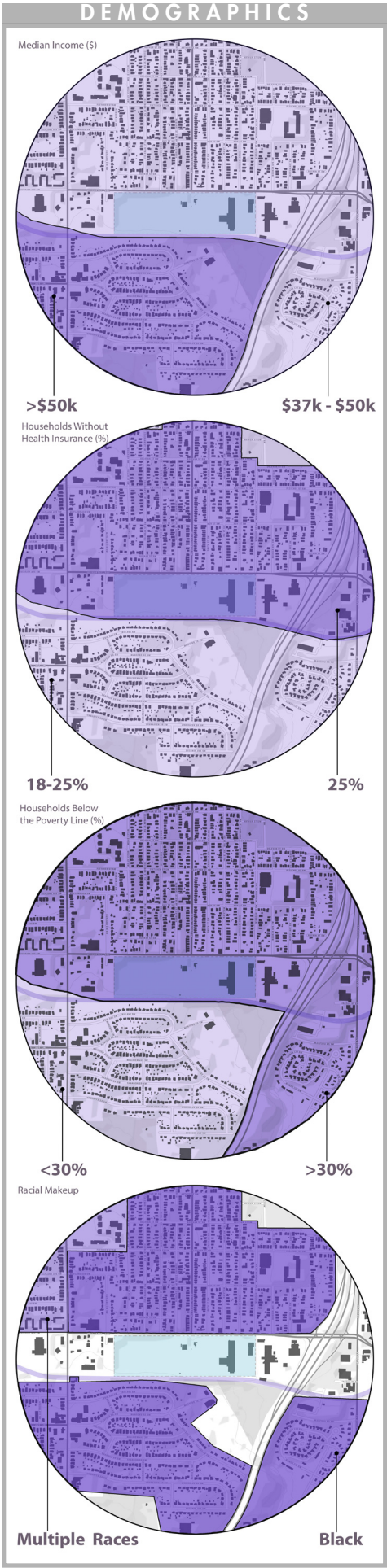
The site is a 2000' by 600' (1.2 million sq. ft.) area of land composed mostly of asphalt parking, concrete foundation pads, and a large, decrepit, abandoned building skeleton. This isn't uncommon in Pittsburgh; its industrial history lends it to having multiple sites like this located within its borders, but what makes the site unique is its large size and its proximity to the Beltline, acting as a gateway to the neighborhood.

This is also a brownfield site that sits within a strip of industrial zoning, between two neighborhoods, providing a host of opportunity: remedy the environmental impact of the brownfield site and reconnect the separated neighborhoods.

CLIMATE

Atlanta has a humid subtropical climate with four distinct seasons and generous precipitation year-round, typical for the inland South. Summers are hot and humid, with temperatures somewhat moderated. Winters are cool but variable, with an average of 48 freezing days per year with very low temperatures and snow/ice being rare on occasion. Warm air from the Gulf of Mexico can bring spring-like highs while strong Arctic air masses can push lows into the teens. Extreme weather conditions like earthquakes, tornadoes and ice storms are very rare.

Sunlight is abundant with an adequate number of sunshine hours year-round. Sitting at a latitude of 33 degrees and with a max altitude of 80 degrees in summer, daylighting plays a huge part in all sustainable architectural endeavors.





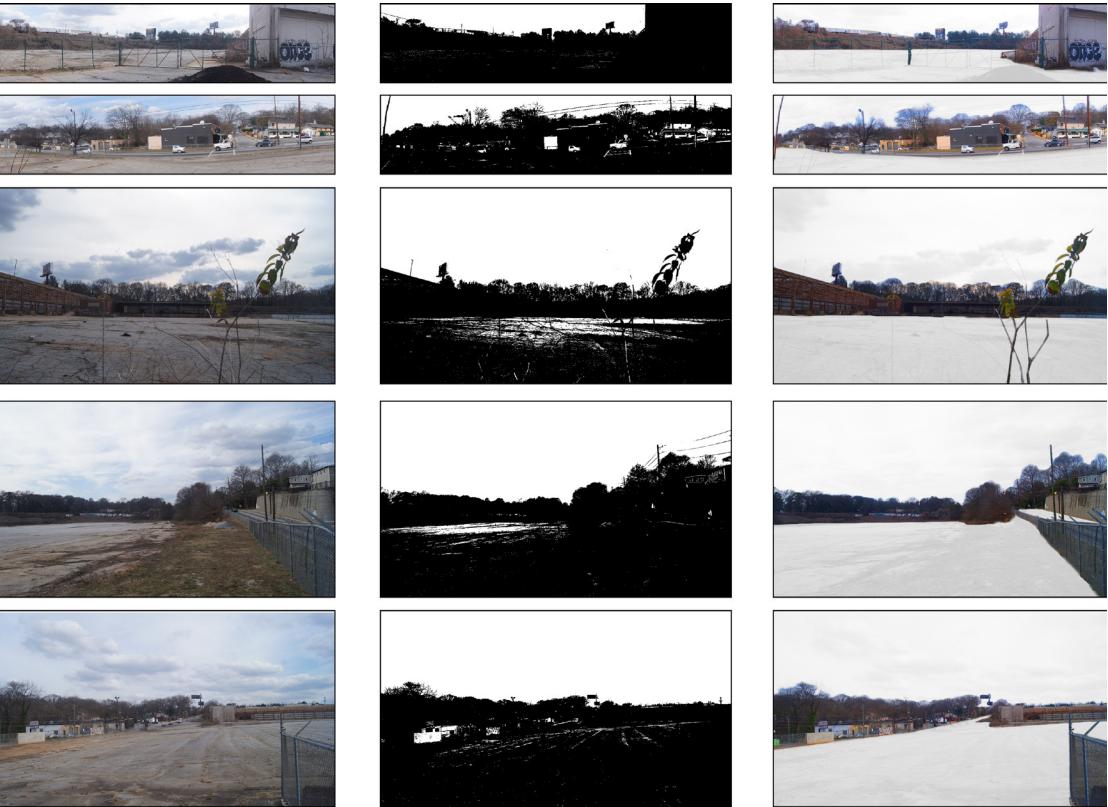
Section A-A



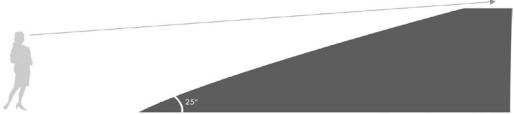
Section B-B



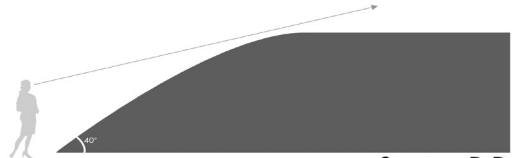
Sections



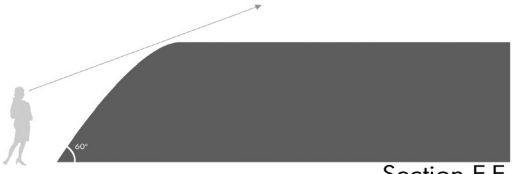
Sky-Ground Relation



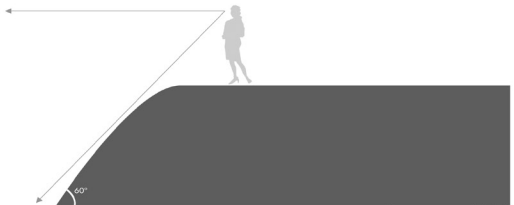
Section C-C



Section D-D



Section E-E



Section F-F

Existing Berms

TEXTURE AND MATERIALS



Sharp Transparent Natural	Rough Sharp Transparent Natural	Rough Hard Artificial	Rough Hard Artificial	Hard Smooth Artificial	Hard Smooth Artificial	Rough Natural Artificial Hard	Rough Hard Artificial	Hard Smooth Artificial	Transparent Natural	Soft Natural	Soft Natural	Rough Transparent Artificial	Sharp Rough Transparent Artificial	Rough Hard Artificial	Rough Transparent Artificial



Rough

Smooth

Transparent

Sharp

Soft

Hard

Natural

Artificial

PROGRAM : REALMS OF THE SUBLIME

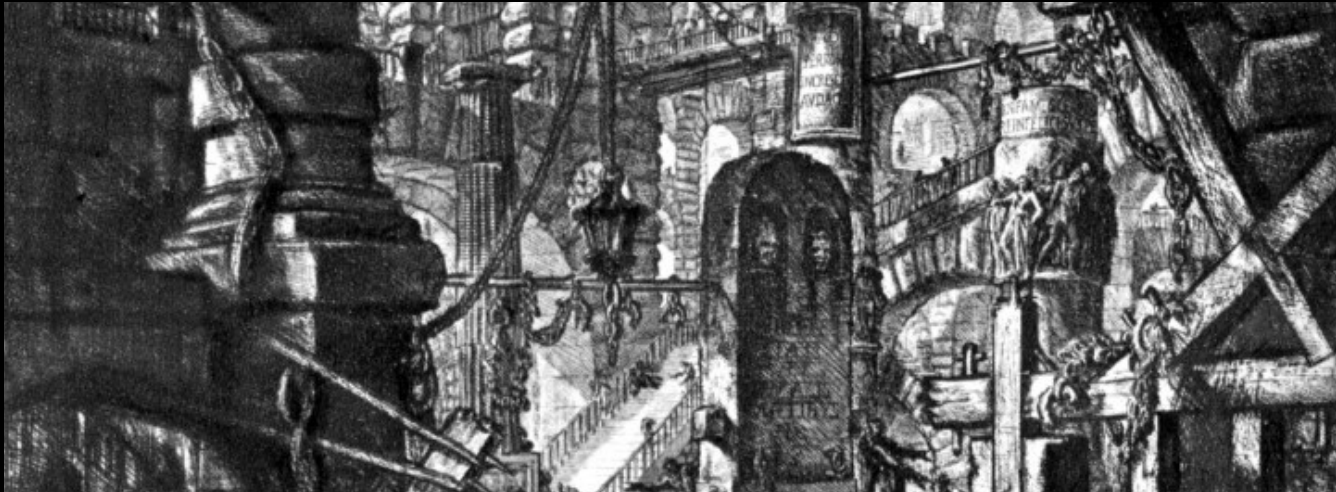
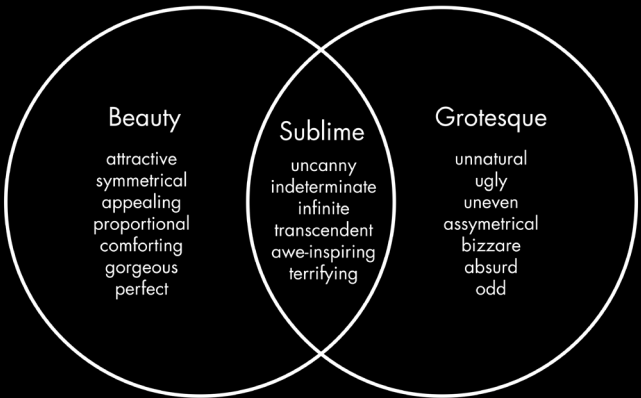


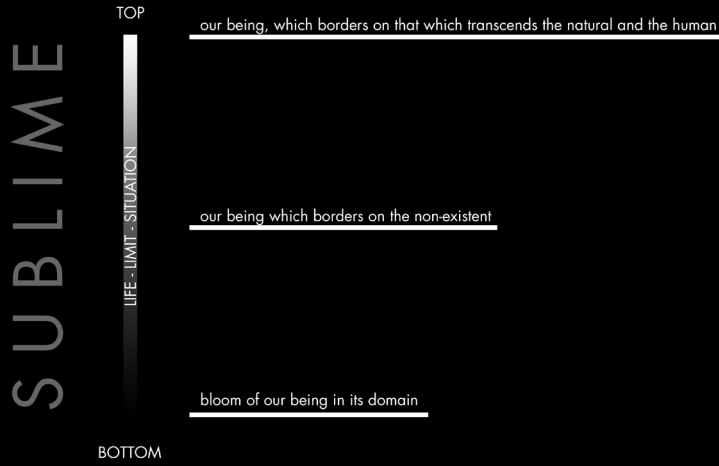
FIG. 28

The “sublime” as an aesthetic category evokes discussions of beauty, transcendence and otherworldliness. It’s an idea that has been discussed since antiquity in philosophy, psychology, literature, art, and even architecture. It’s a quality of greatness that something possesses and is immeasurable through quantitative means. Therefore, it is ultimately subjective and, when approached from an artistic or architectural perspective, only becomes more abstract and undefinable.

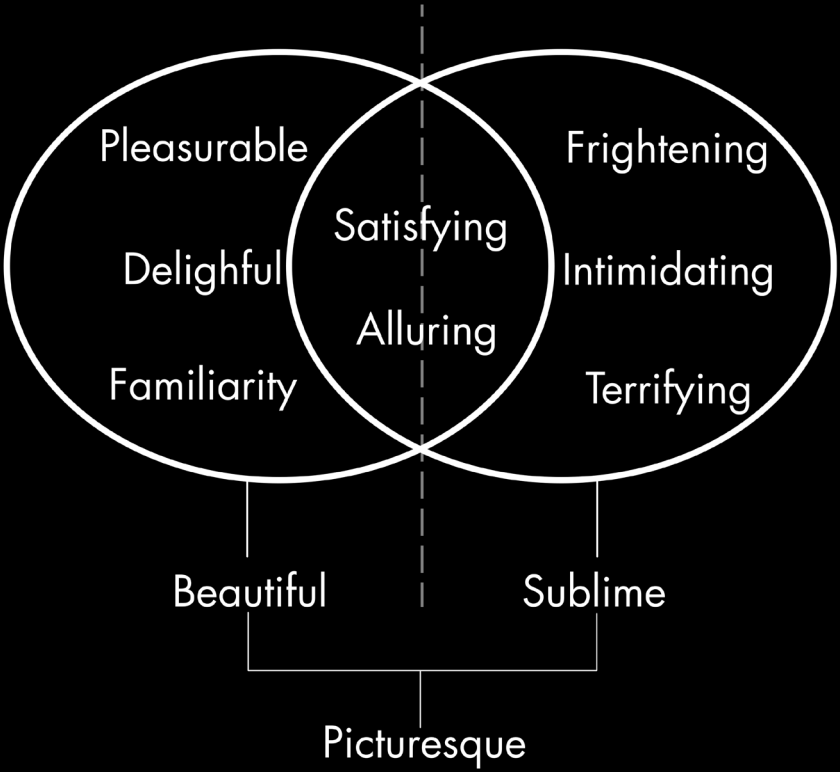
However, these undefinable qualities are what evoke the most feeling, create the richest experiences and add poetry and imagery to steel and concrete. In his book *On the Sublime* (1st century A.D.), the Greek philosopher “Longinus” attributed the sublime with having great persuasive powers to inspire awe and veneration and refers to not only older scholars such as the Greek philosopher Homer, but to biblical sources such as Genesis. In truly understanding and defining the “sublime,” this thesis can transcend simple program and focus on creating a unforgettable user experience much needed for such a somber program.



-Peter Eisenman



-Tsang Lap Cheun



-Uvedale Price

ARCHITECTS have used sublime as an aesthetics category representing the juxtapositions between attraction and fear attained by the grand, the vast and the natural. Architects like Peter Eisenman link sublime to grotesque as it parallels to avant-garde painters’ use of the sublime to invoke “the indeterminate or nondemonstrable.”

PHILOSOPHERS have often involve the sublime within the discourse of emotion as it relates to human emotion and transcendence. Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant led the debate on sublime, seeing it beauty’s opposite. Recent theorists like Tsang Lap Cheun see sublime, not as object with one common property, but as a manner in which objects are constructed and plays a part in our self-realization of our life-limits.

ARTISTS have been implementing the sublime into their work for centuries. It often featured depictions of nature and landscapes in its majesty, intersecting it with the picturesque in some respects.

One of the earliest theorists of the picturesque, Sir Uvedale Price, proposed the area situated between the serenely beautiful and the awe-inspiring sublime as being the uniquely picturesque containing a variety of elements, curious details, and interesting textures, conveyed in a palette of dark to light that brings these details to life. These depictions even led 18th-century Brits to travel to untamed lands in pursuit of this visual ideal.

BEAUTIFUL

Feeling of Beauty

E.g. Light is reflected off a flower
(Pleasure from a mere perception of an object that cannot hurt observer)

Weakest Feeling of Sublime

E.g. Light reflected off stones
(Pleasure from beholding objects that pose no threat, objects devoid of life)

Weaker Feeling of Sublime

E.g. Endless desert with no movement
(Pleasure from seeing objects that could not sustain the life of the observer)

Sublime

E.g. Turbulent Nature
(Pleasure from perceiving objects that threaten to hurt or destroy observer)

Full Feeling of Sublime

E.g. Overpowering turbulent Nature
(Pleasure from beholding very violent, destructive objects)

Fullest Feeling of Sublime

E.g. Immensity of universe's extent or duration
(Pleasure from knowledge of observer's nothingness and oneness with Nature)

SUBLIME

V S

BEAUTY

attractive
pretty
alluring
symmetrical
appealing
proportional
comforting
gorgeous
perfect

SUBLIME

majestic
grand
vast
asymmetric
natural
awe-inspiring
terrifying
divine
transcendent

PROPONENTS OF THE SUBLIME

GIOVANNI
BATTISTA
PIRANESI

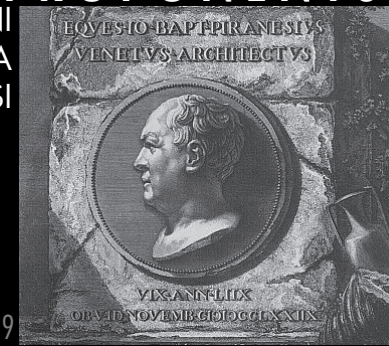


FIG. 29

"LONGINUS"



FIG. 31

JOHN
RUSKIN

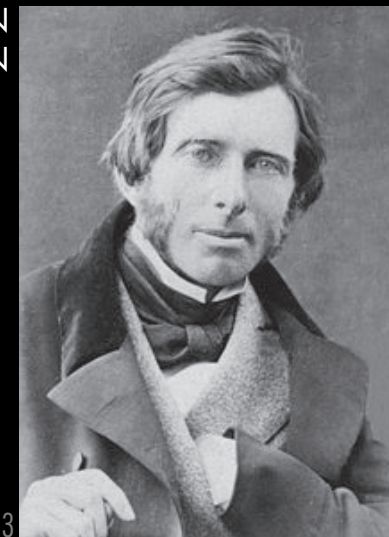


FIG. 33

EDMUND BURKE

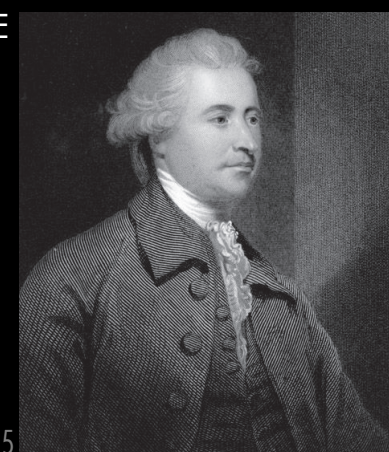


FIG. 35

VEDALE PRICE



FIG. 30

ARTHUR
SCHOPENHAUER

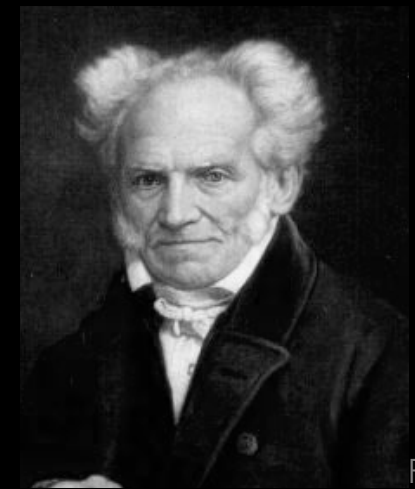


FIG. 32

JEAN-FRANÇOIS
LYOTARD

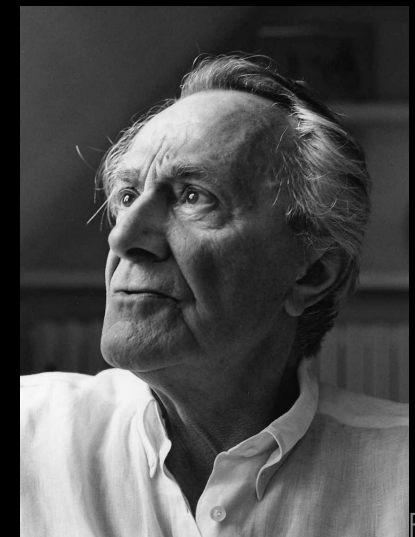


FIG. 34

IMMANUEL KANT

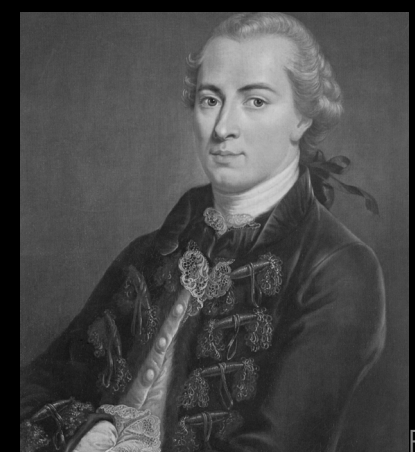
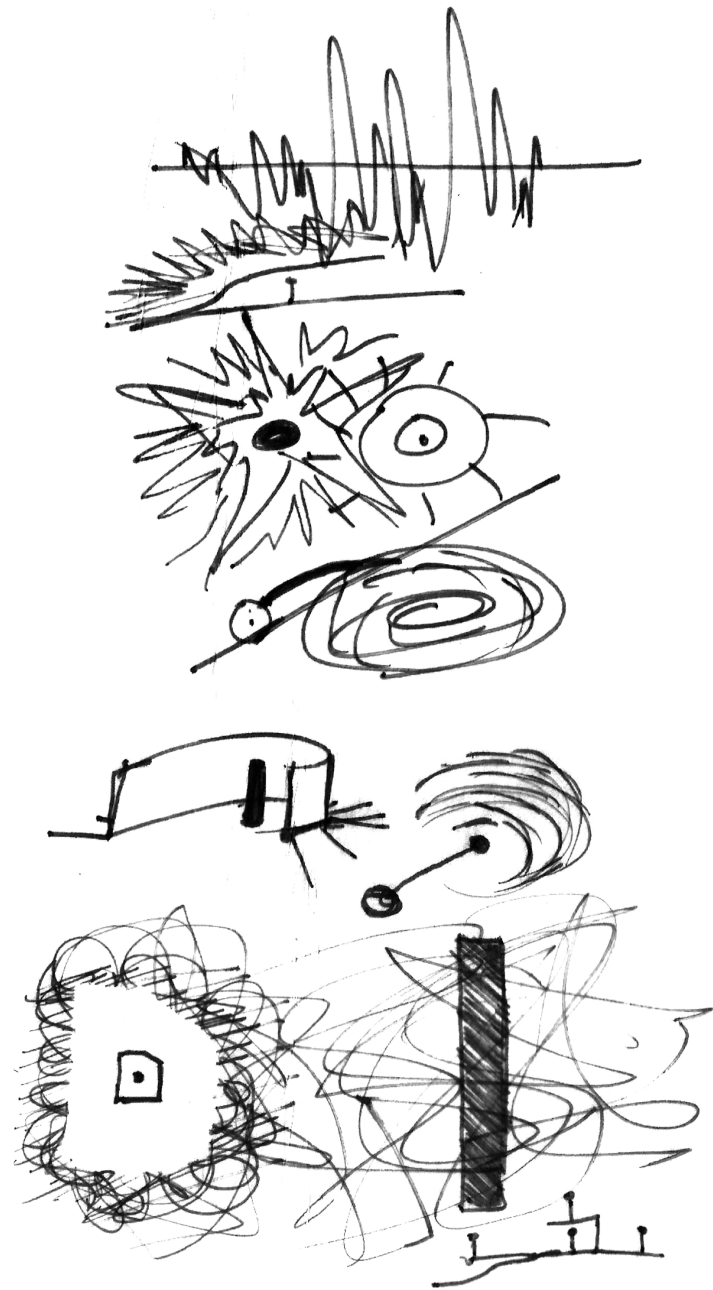


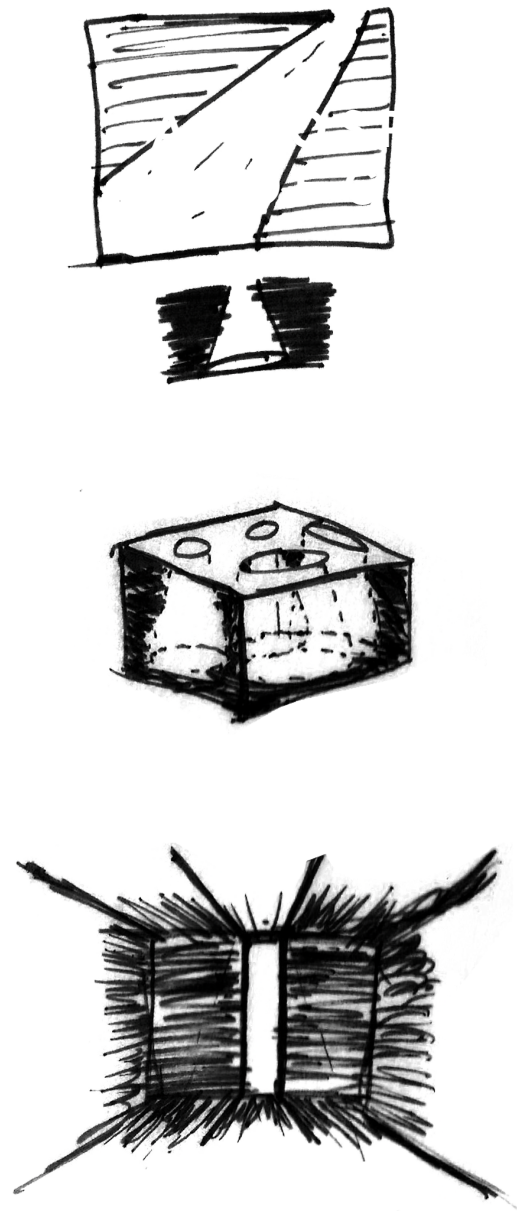
FIG. 36

There seems to be a dichotomy that exists within the realm of grief and mourning in terms of the range of emotions the bereaved exhibit. This makes it difficult to pinpoint specific spaces that fit the mourning behaviors of each individual. This coincides with the "sublime", a concept which is somewhat self-contradictory; an attraction to that which is frightening. A vast untamed quality that causes one to be "rapt" and "ravished" by the vast, the grand, and the majestic.

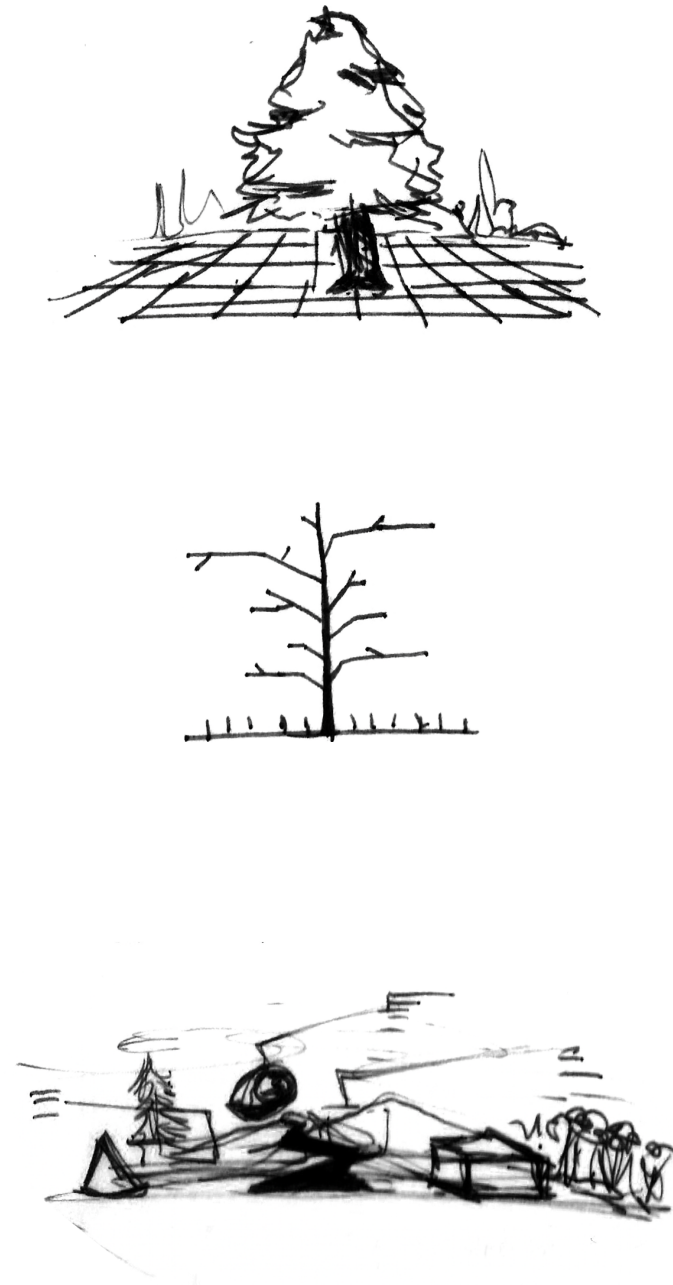
LOUD - QUIET



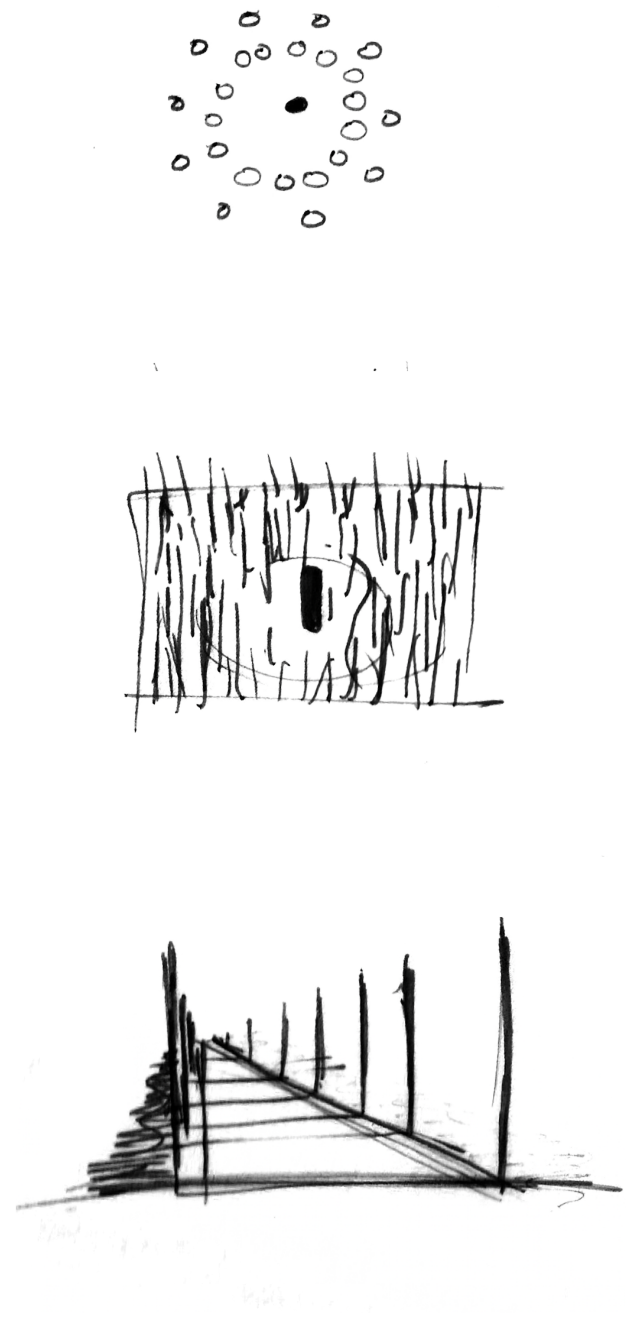
LIGHT - DARK



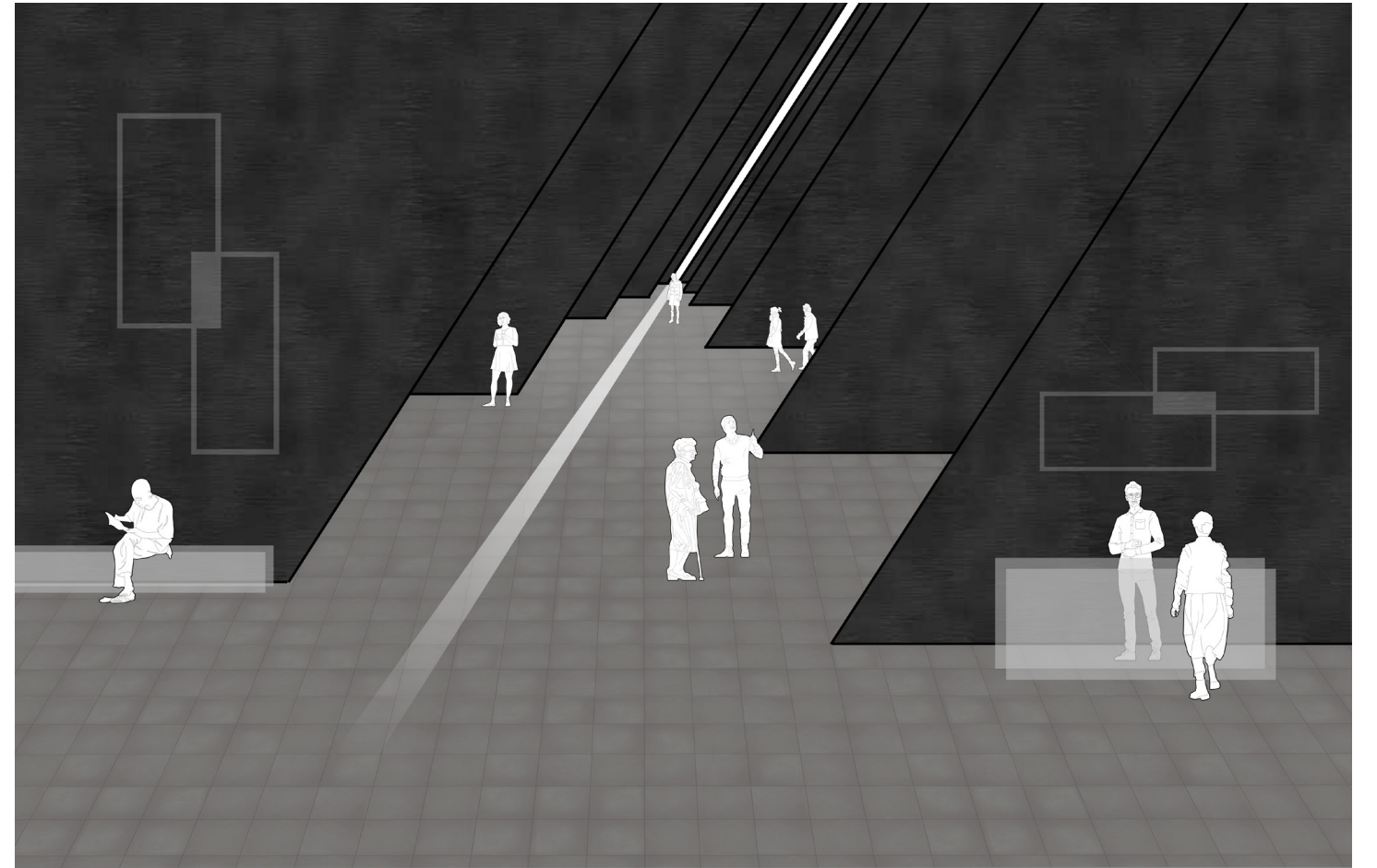
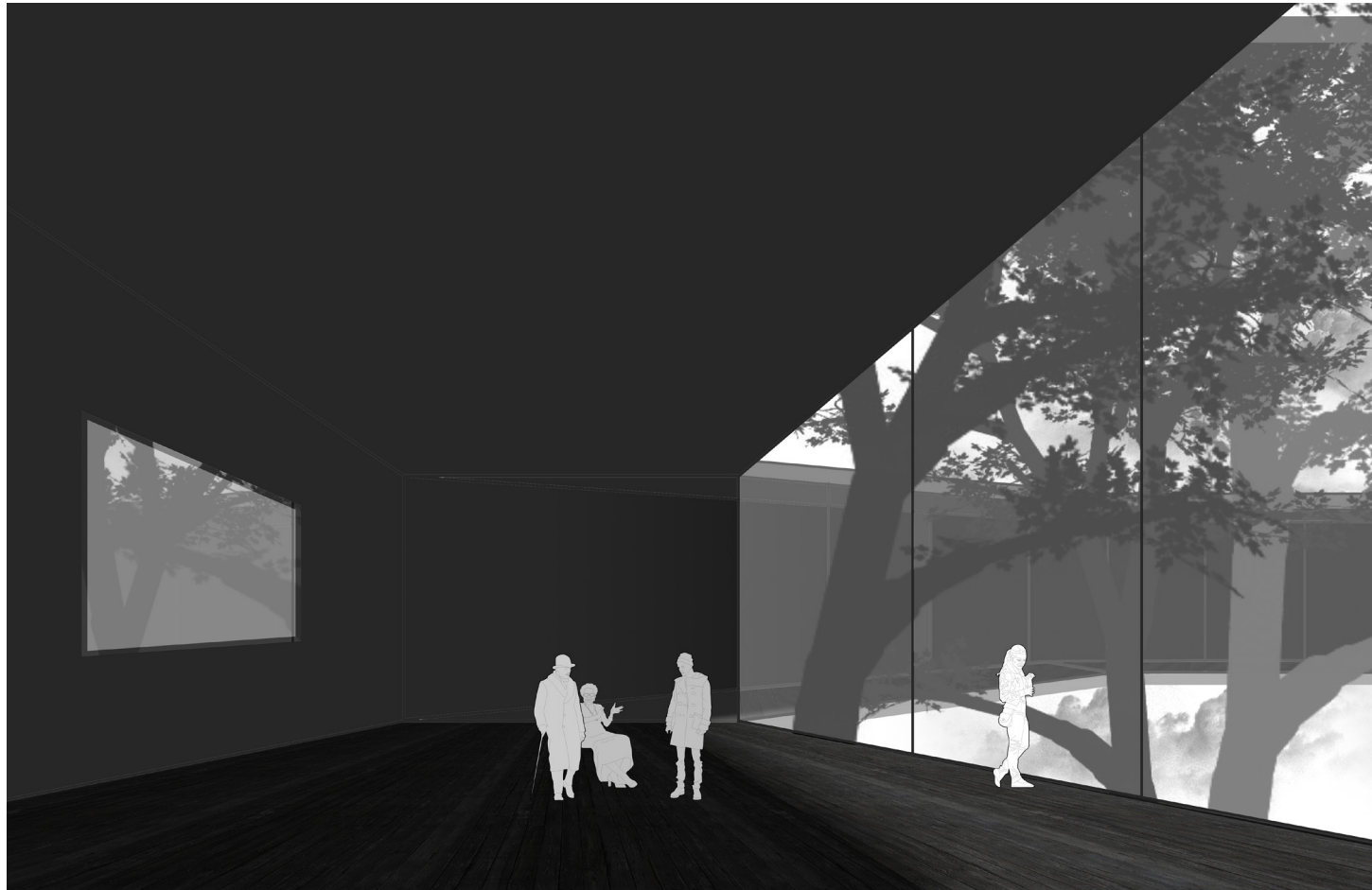
NATURAL - ARTIFICIAL

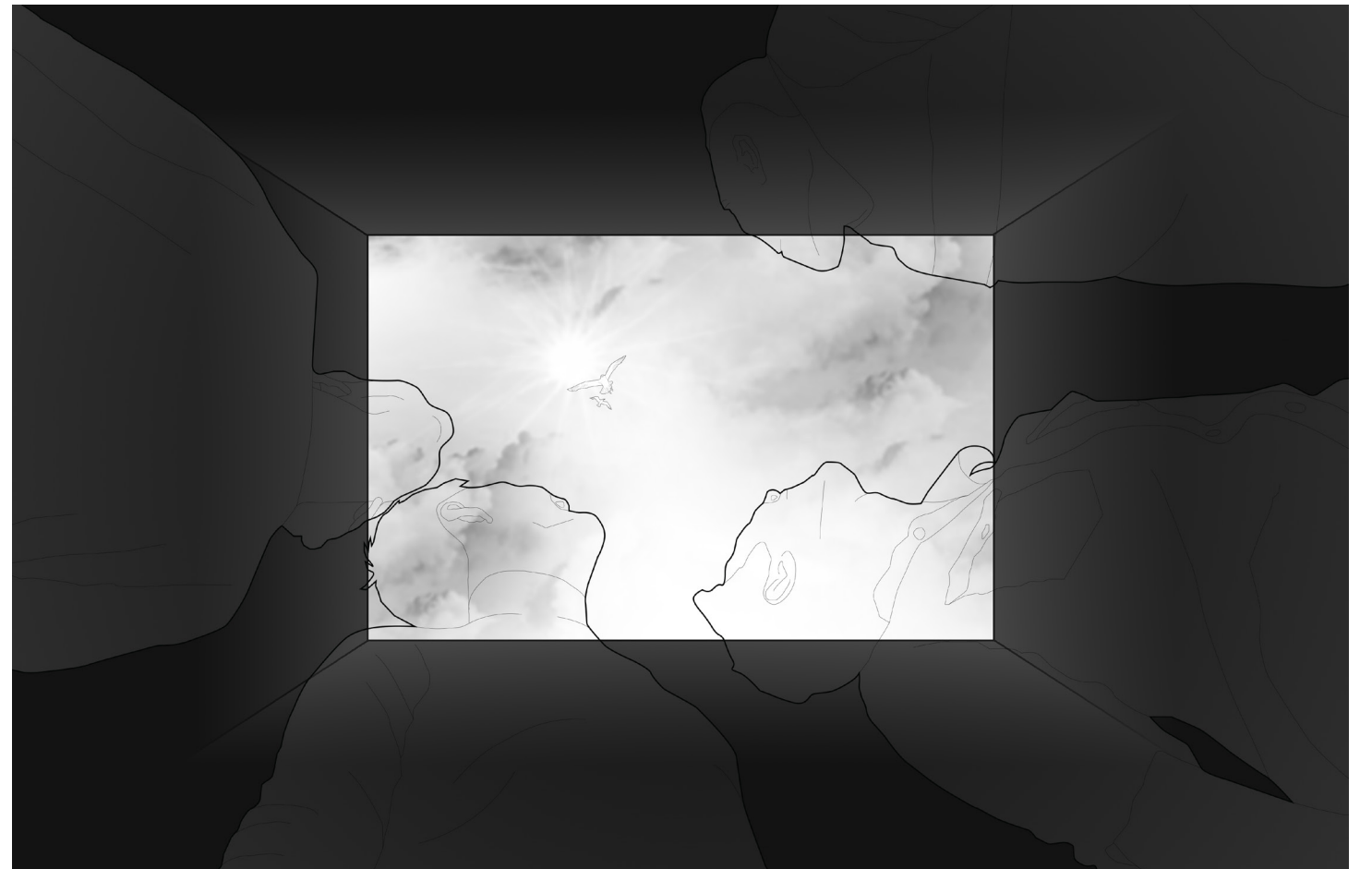
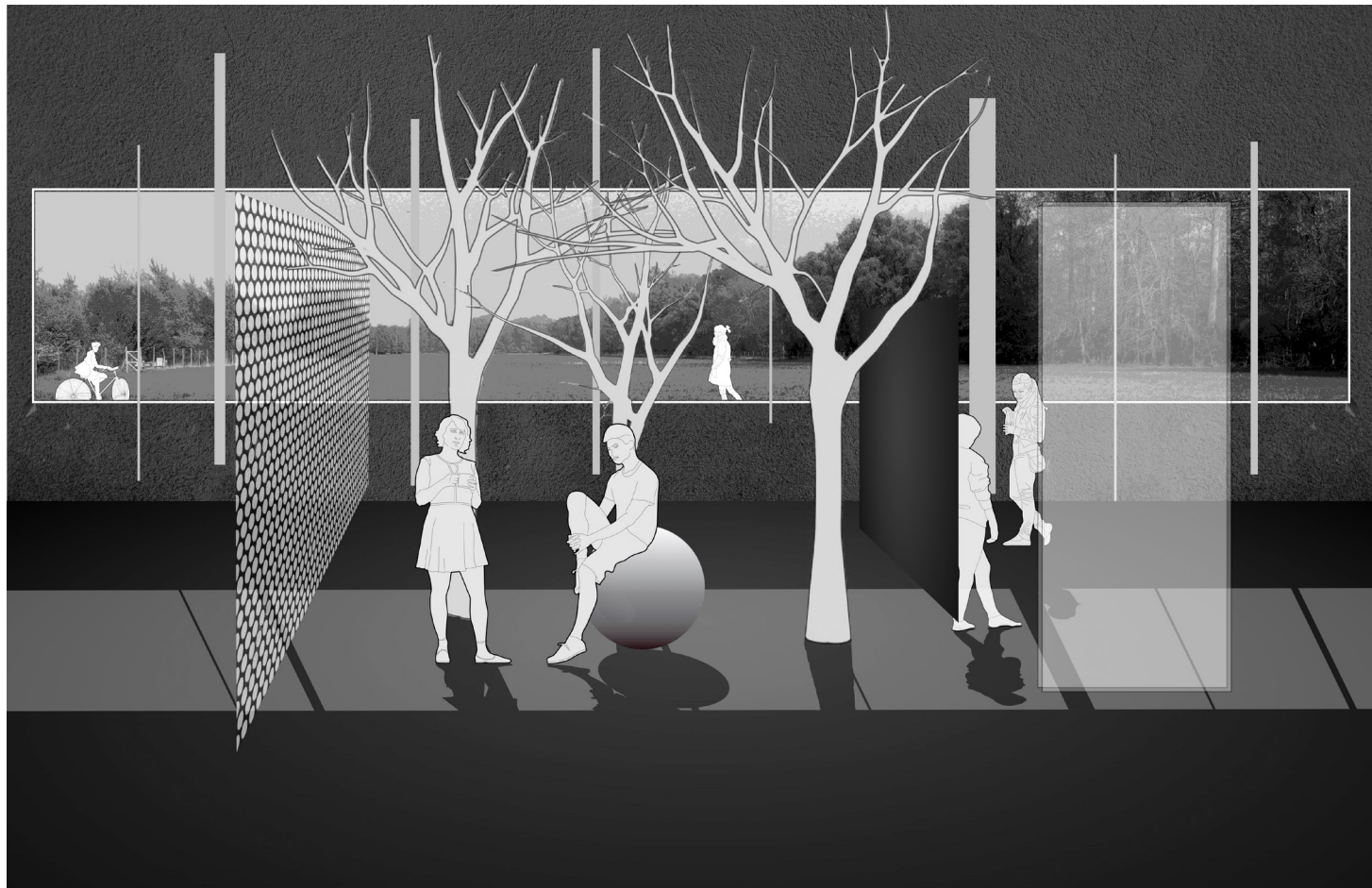


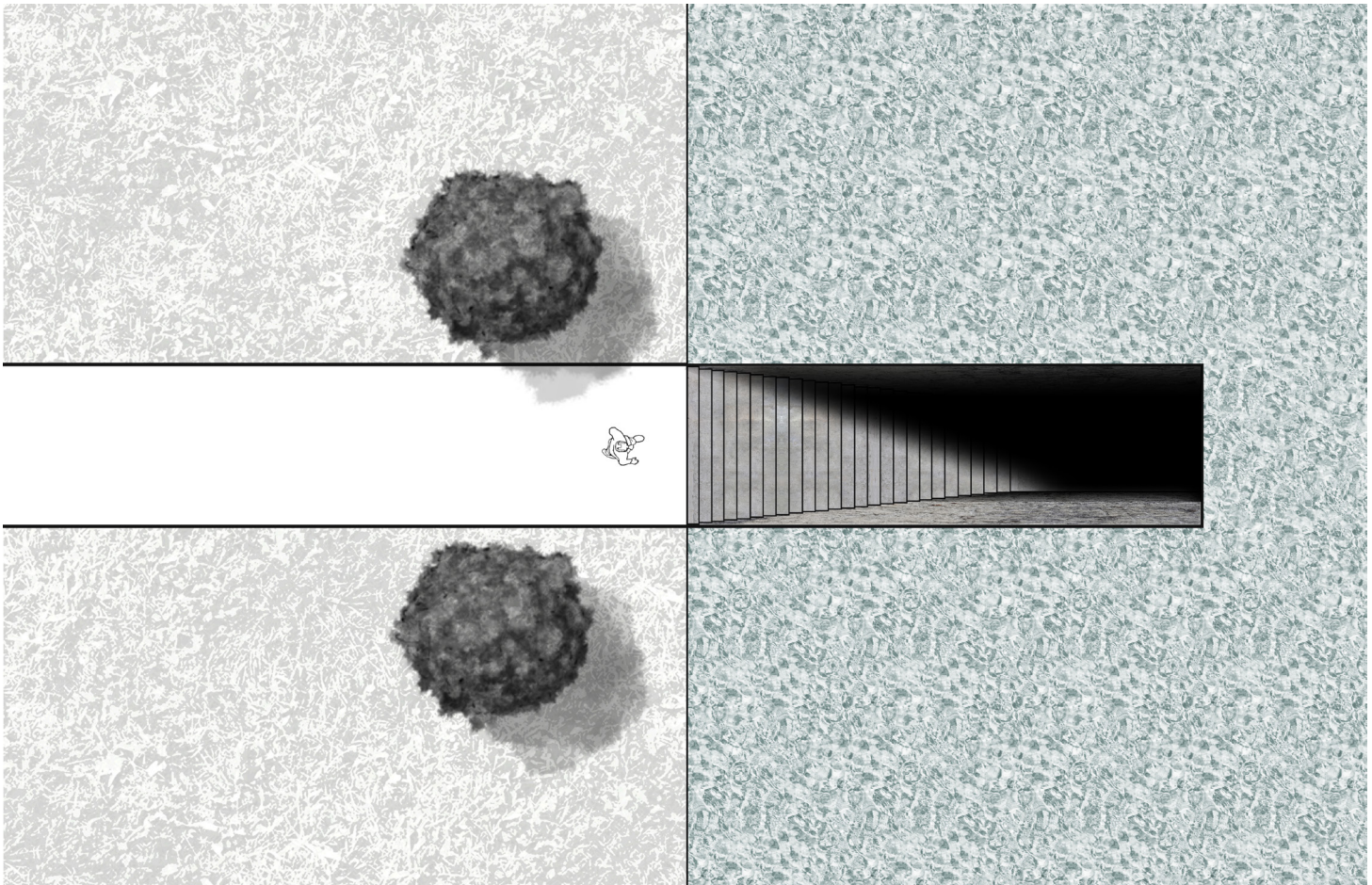
INDIVIDUAL - COLLECTIVE



The following images theorize a response to this sublime-beautiful dichotomy. The qualities that these spaces have are ones of contrast, exhibiting the range of emotions that one feels and environments one might inhabit when mourning and the atmospheres with which they coincide.







•Chapel/Service Hall

Every cemetery needs a main hall for service and procession. A place for the bereaved to enact rituals that bring culture and individuality to each death.

•Place for handling body

There needs to be a space for handling any processes needed to dispose of the body such as cremation ovens, chambers, cleaning rooms, etc.

•Spots for solitude/meditation

Everyone doesn't grieve identically. Some share stories amongst a crowd while some process through solitude and reflection. Providing a place for this caters to a wider gamut of emotions and create spaces of undefined program for fluid use.

•Park

Many cemeteries are posed as sacred spaces that must remain "pure" by being perfectly manicured, seldom used spaces for quiet services and solemn reflection. But by intersecting this typology with that of a park, the "cemetery" is made truly public and brings life to the cemetery, and the cemetery to the community

•Death Education

In order to help remove the stigma and fear associated with death in our society, there needs to be a place that can help debunk death-related myths, facilitate a dialogue about death and help us look death, face-to-face, and critically evaluate how it affects our culture and beliefs.

•Courtyard

A large number of modern cemeteries contain some form of courtyard. This is becoming a trend, probably because of the privacy a courtyard provides, especially in a highly public area, blending the functions of a service hall and a meditation space.

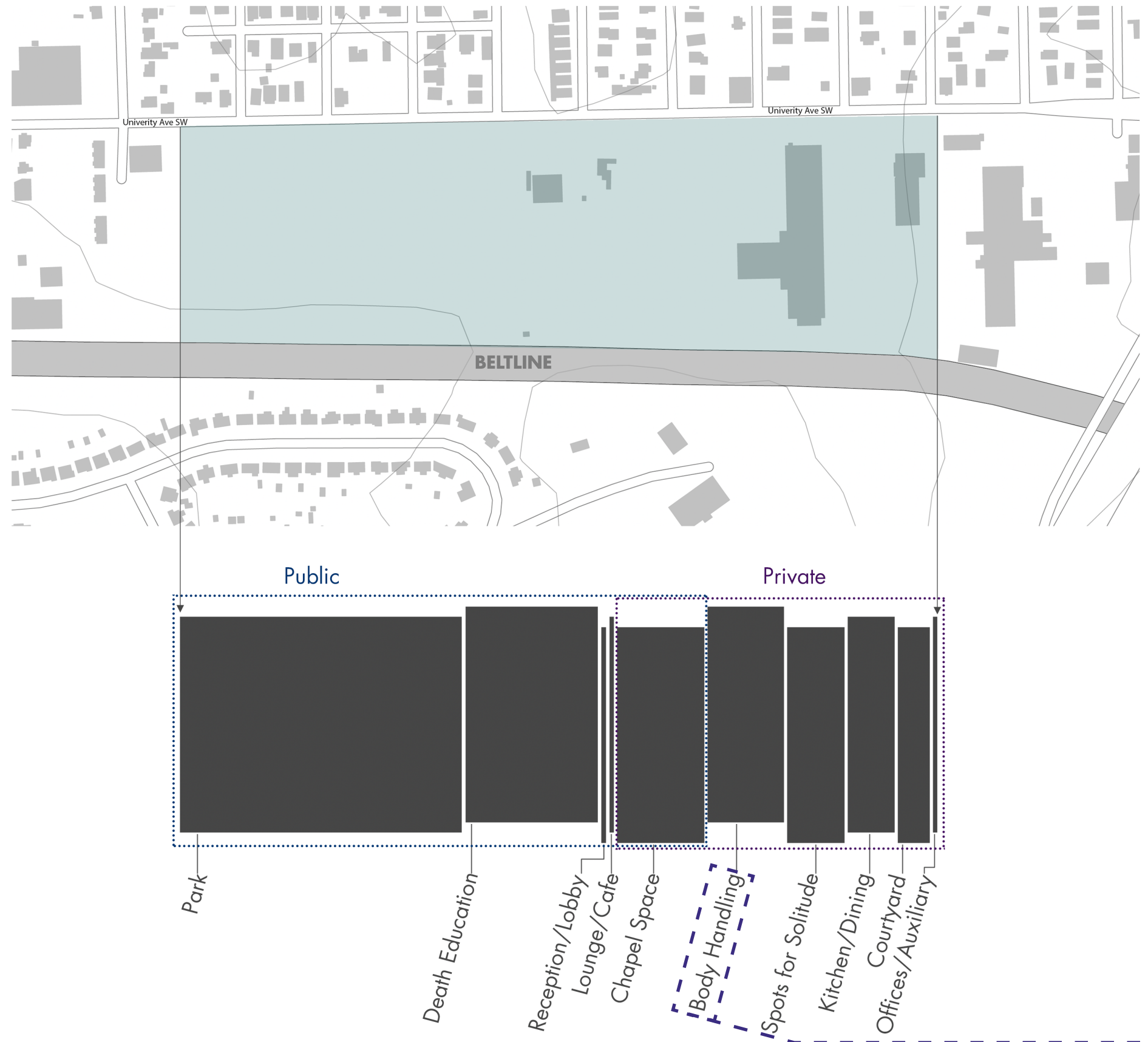
•Kitchen/Dining

A medium to large room where people can gather after a service to talk and eat together.




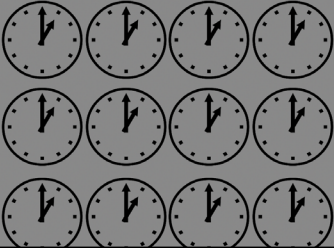




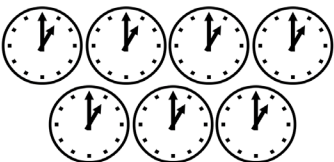





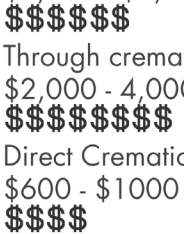










•Lounge/Cafe

•Reception/Lobby

•Offices/Auxiliary



BODY HANDLING METHODS

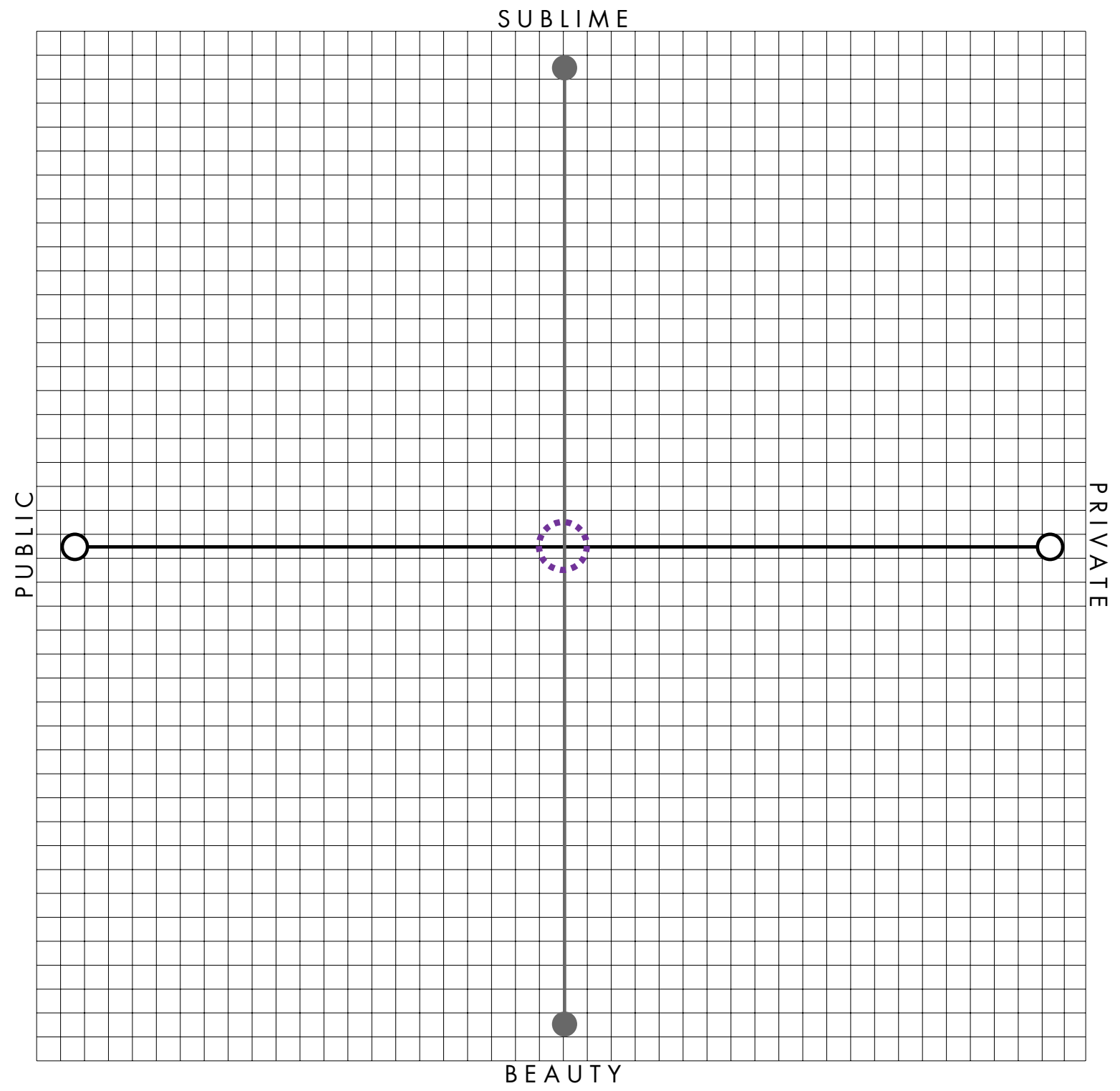
Death Custom	Process	Remains	Equipment Needed	Decomposition Time	Average Cost (\$ = \$500)	Considerations for Site
<div>Traditional Burial</div> <div></div>	Placing a body in a casket and burying in ground (sometimes within vault)	Casket, semi-preserved body, (vault, tombstone) <div></div>	Casket, Burial plot <div></div>	Almost Never <div></div>	\$7,000-\$10,000 <div></div>	<div>-“Environmental Permanence” of burial plots requires a lot of space.</div> <div>-Uses embalming fluids that can leach into the ground and exacerbate the contamination of the site.</div>
<div>Natural Burial</div> <div></div>	Placing body in biodegradable casket or shroud and then into ground	Humus (Compost), (grave marker) <div></div>	Shroud or biodegradable casket, Burial plot <div></div>	Six-feet under, no casket, normal soil: ~8-12 years <div></div>	\$1,000-\$4,000 <div></div>	<div>-No harmful emissions released onto the site</div> <div>-A “green” cemetery must follow regulations laid out by the Green Burial Council</div>
<div>Cremation</div> <div></div>	Burning remains in cremation oven	Ash <div></div>	Cremation Oven, Ventilation system, Container (urn) <div></div>	Process: 2-2.5 hours for normal sized body Decay: Instantly (never if buried in urn) <div></div>	Through funeral home \$1,500 - \$3,000 Through crematorium \$2,000 - 4,000 Direct Cremation* \$600 - \$1000 <div></div>	<div>-Can release CO₂ and harmful chemicals into the atmosphere</div> <div>-Is common to have garden dedicated to scattering ashes</div>
<div>Resomation/ Green Cremation (Alkaline Hydrolysis)</div> <div></div>	Body is placed in a highly pressurized chamber filled with water and lye is heated, breaking down body into its chemical components	“Ash” and liquid <div></div>	Resomation Chamber, Sanitary Drainage access, Container (urn) <div></div>	Process: 2-3 hours Decay: Instantly <div></div>	\$600-\$2000 <div></div>	<div>-Environmentally friendly alternative to cremation</div> <div>-Only legal in thirteen states (including GA)</div>
<div>Promession</div> <div></div>	Body is cryogenically frozen, freeze dried and disintegrated, from which metals are separated	Powder <div></div>	“Promator”, Container (urn) <div></div>	Process: ~2-4 hours Decay: 6-12 months (in biodegradable casket in shallow plot) <div></div>	N/A <div></div>	<div>-Very energy efficient</div> <div>-Currently not commercially available, but there is interest from overseas markets</div>

Direct Cremation - a disposition option in which the body is cremated in the days immediately following the death, without a funeral service beforehand, usually in a simple container rather than an expensive casket.

Program generally exists on a spectrum of **public and private**. Mortality exists on a spectrum of **sublime and beautiful**. By overlaying these spectra, we can begin to understand how to apply a topic with such an ethereal nature, the sublime, to a more tangible architectural concept, spatial program.

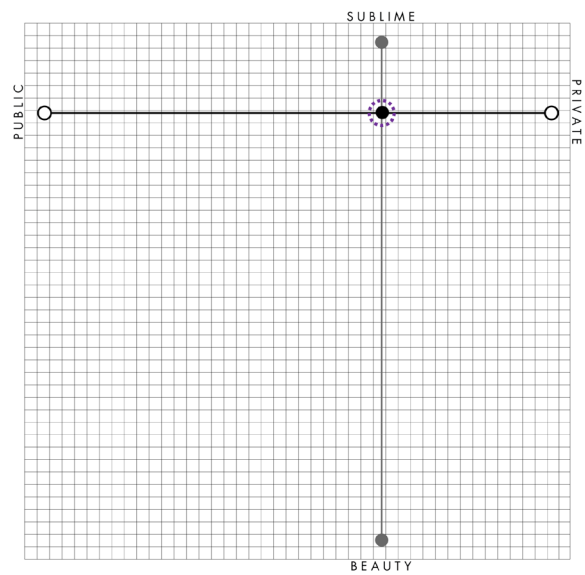
Next, this grid is used to map the experience of each proposed space. Each program must fall somewhere on this grid. While the exact location of each point is debatable (Would you prefer to have a "sublime" experience in a cafeteria?), each space has been mapped based on its general appropriateness of the experience each space should provide in the context of a funerary complex.

By plotting each program on one grid, we can begin to theorize how one moves through the site based on the proximity of points, and thus, the relation of spaces. One major conclusion we can gather from this is that there doesn't seem to be many spaces that fall within the ambiguous central zones of the grid's lower half; a space is either public or private, but may be both sublime and beautiful or neither. Perhaps these areas mark transition zones or the elusive "unpresentable," indeterminate, or "nondemonstrable" that defines the beauty-sublime spectrum.

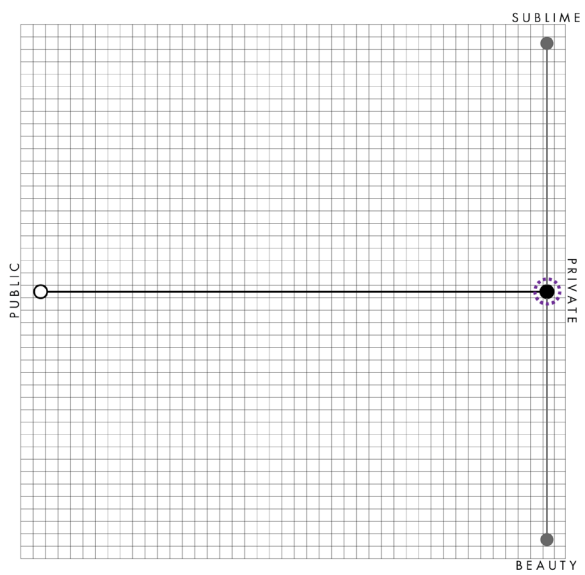


MAPPING PROGRAM ON GRID

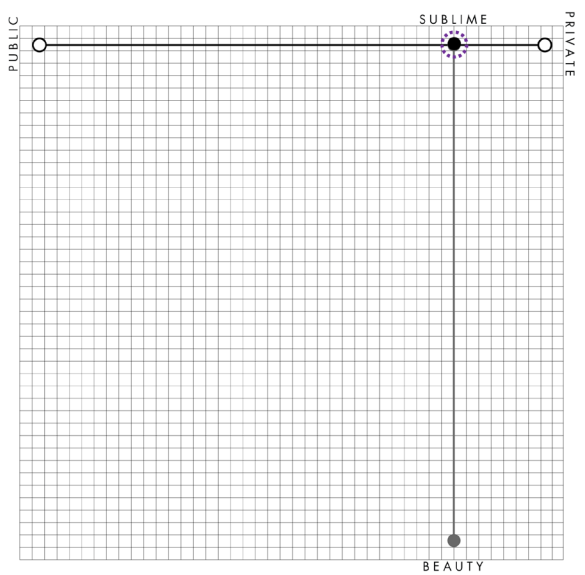
CHAPEL/SERVICE SPACE



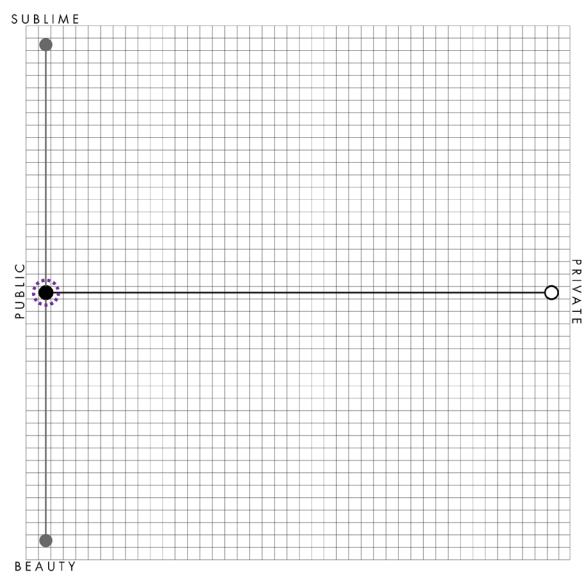
BODY HANDLING



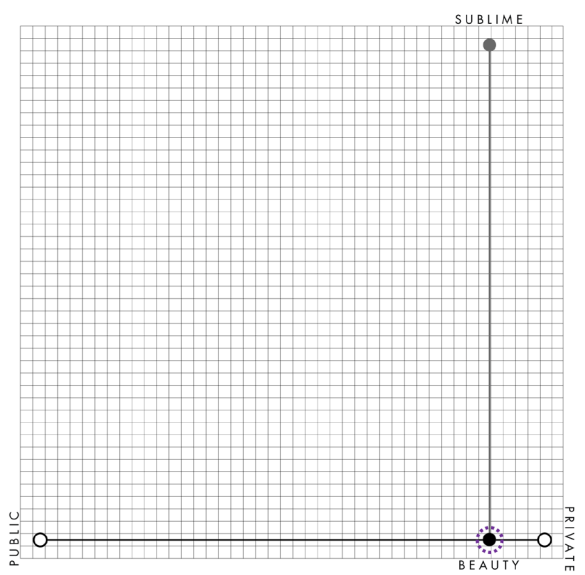
SPOTS OF SOLITUDE



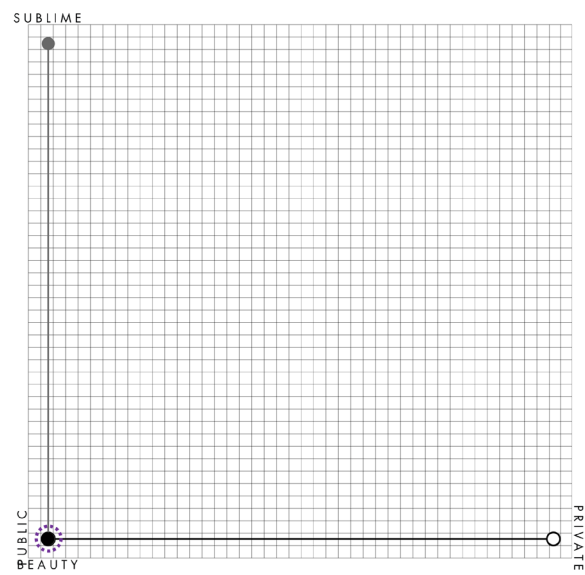
DEATH EDUCATION
(MUSEUM)



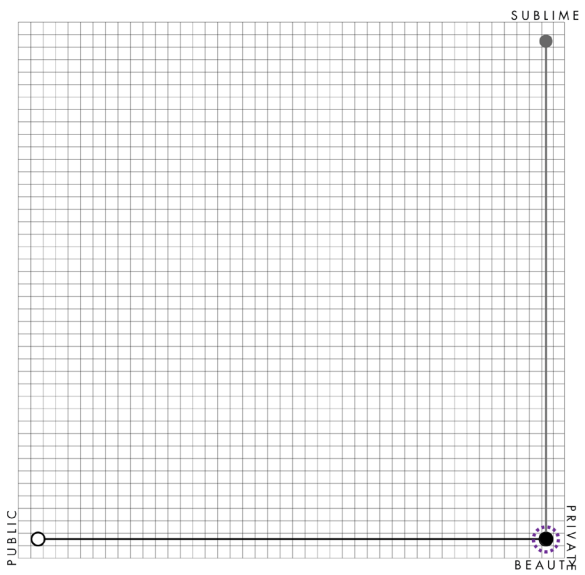
KITCHEN/DINING



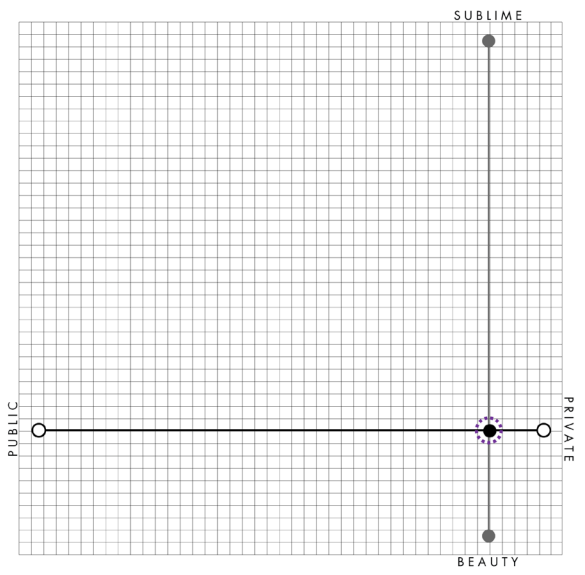
LOUNGE/CAFE



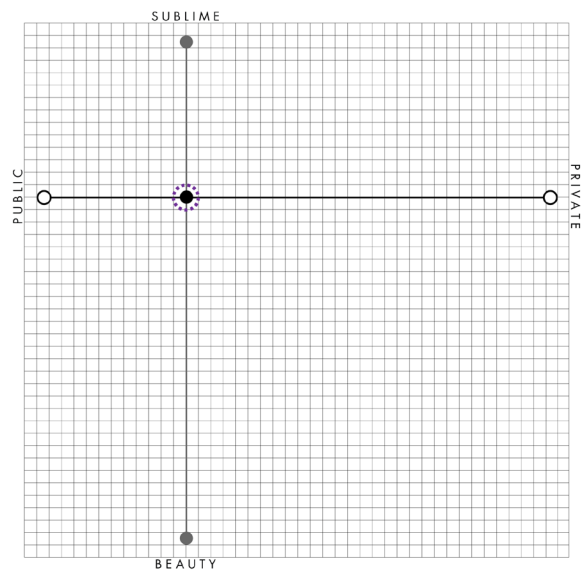
OFFICE/AUXILIARY



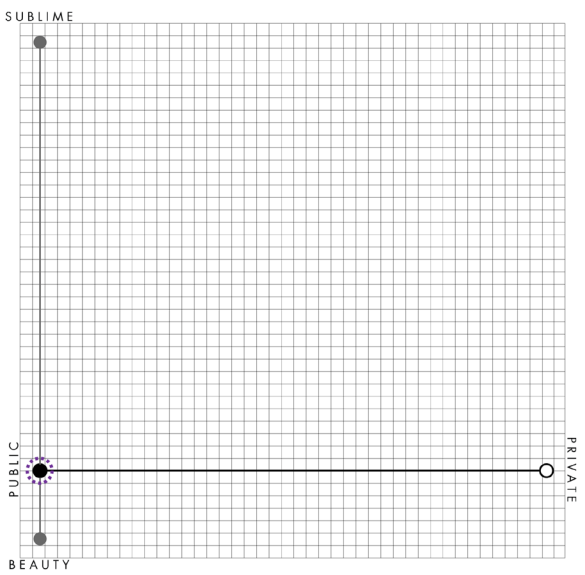
COURTYARD

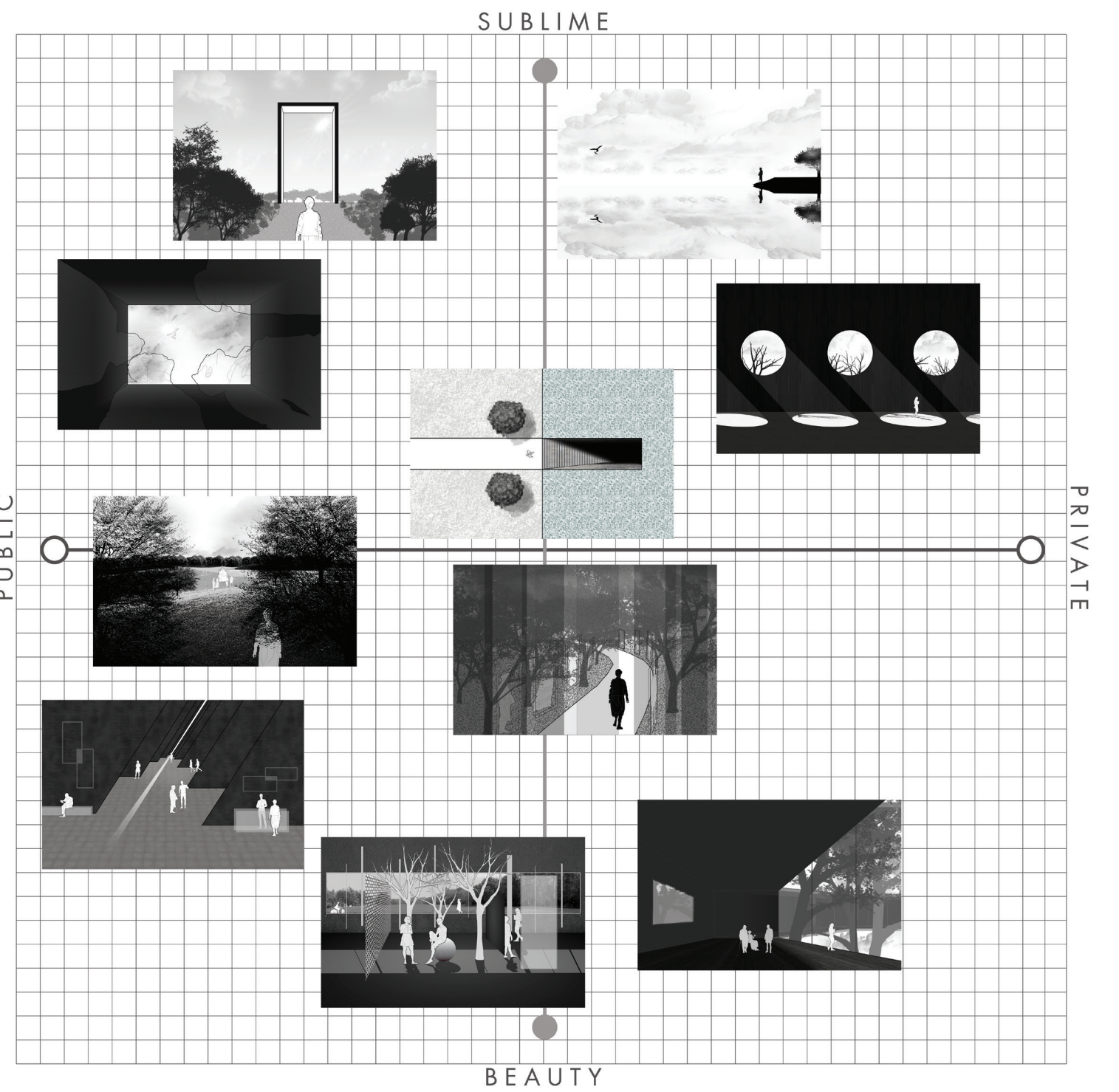
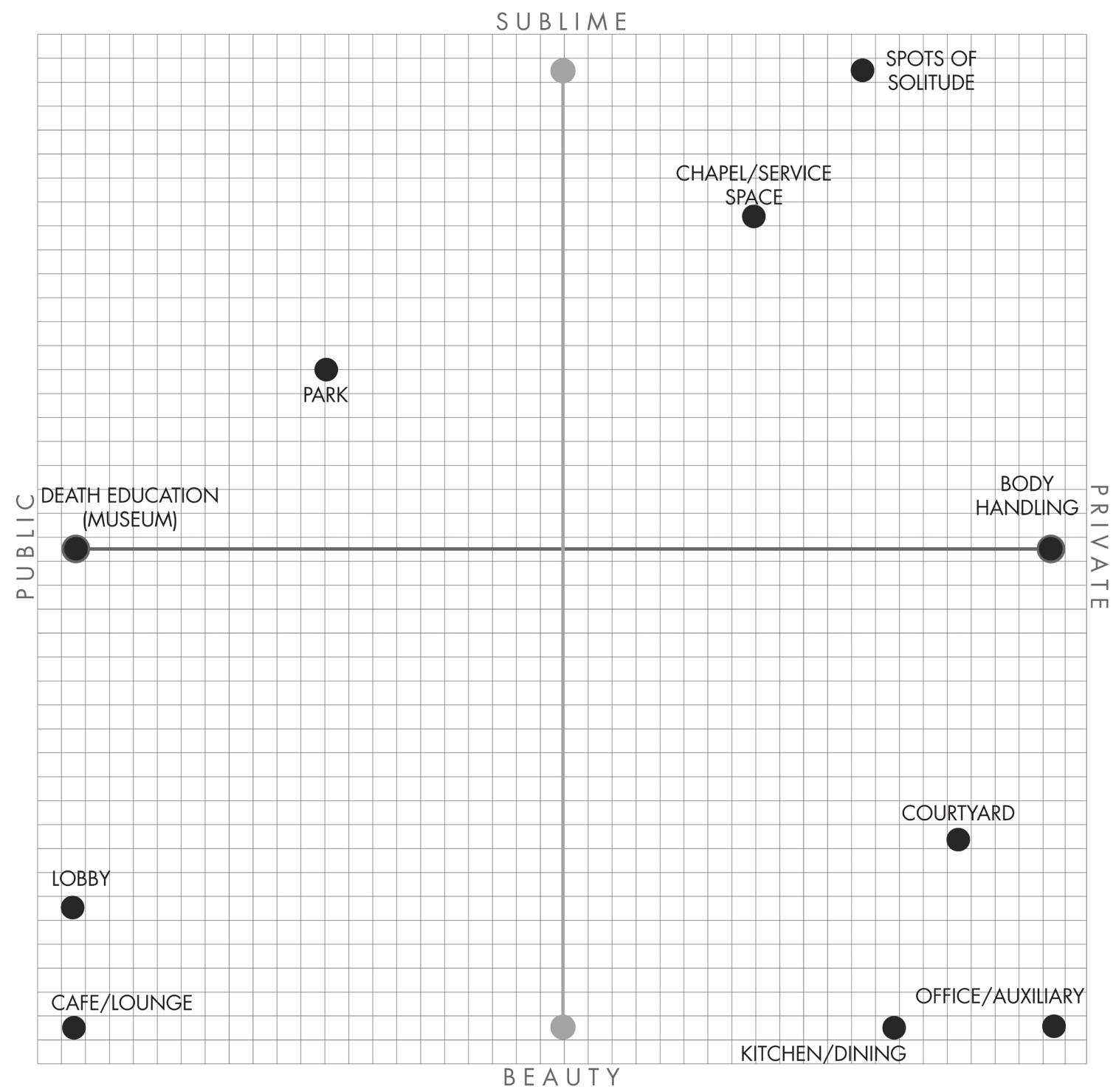


PARK

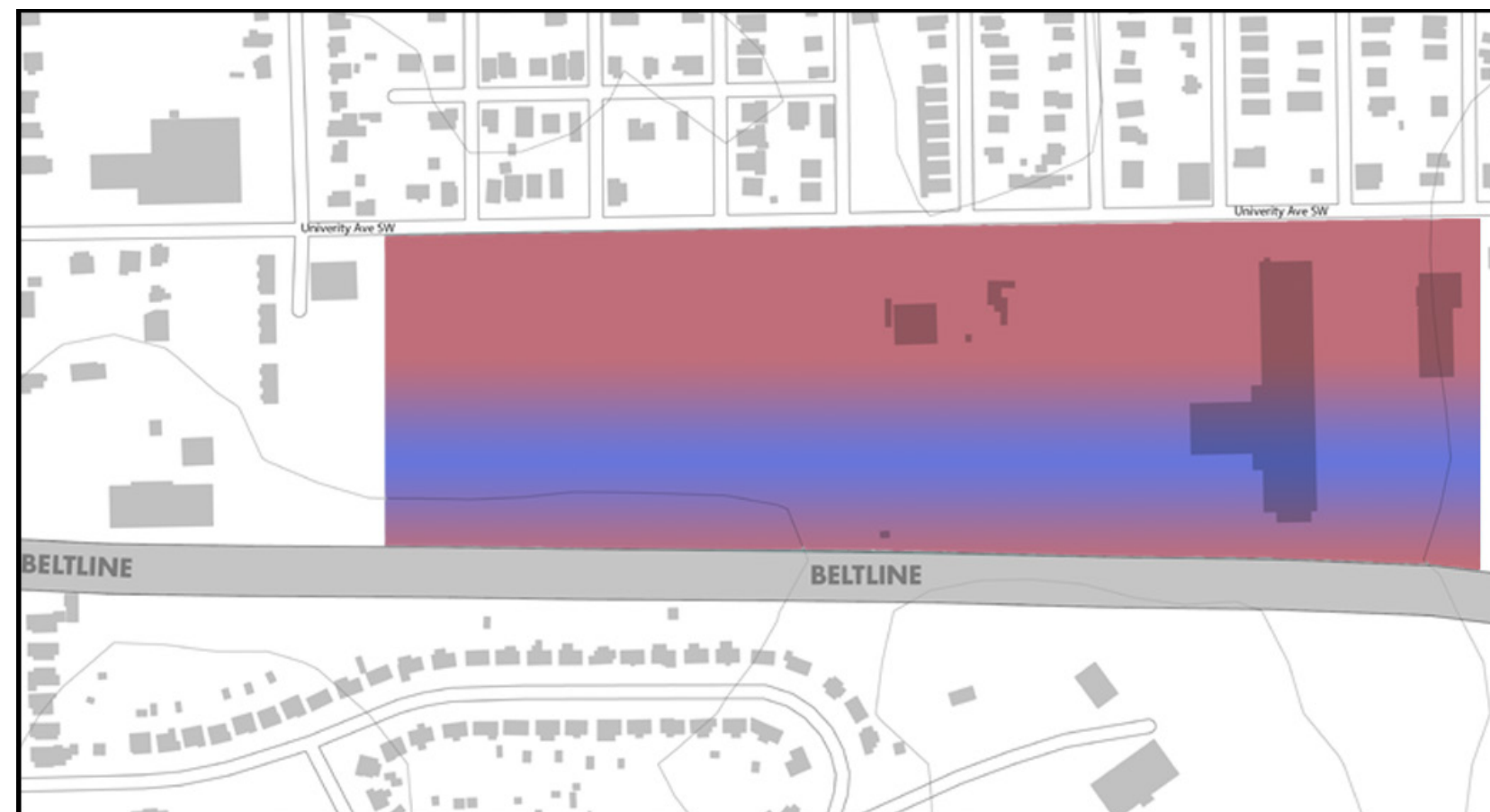


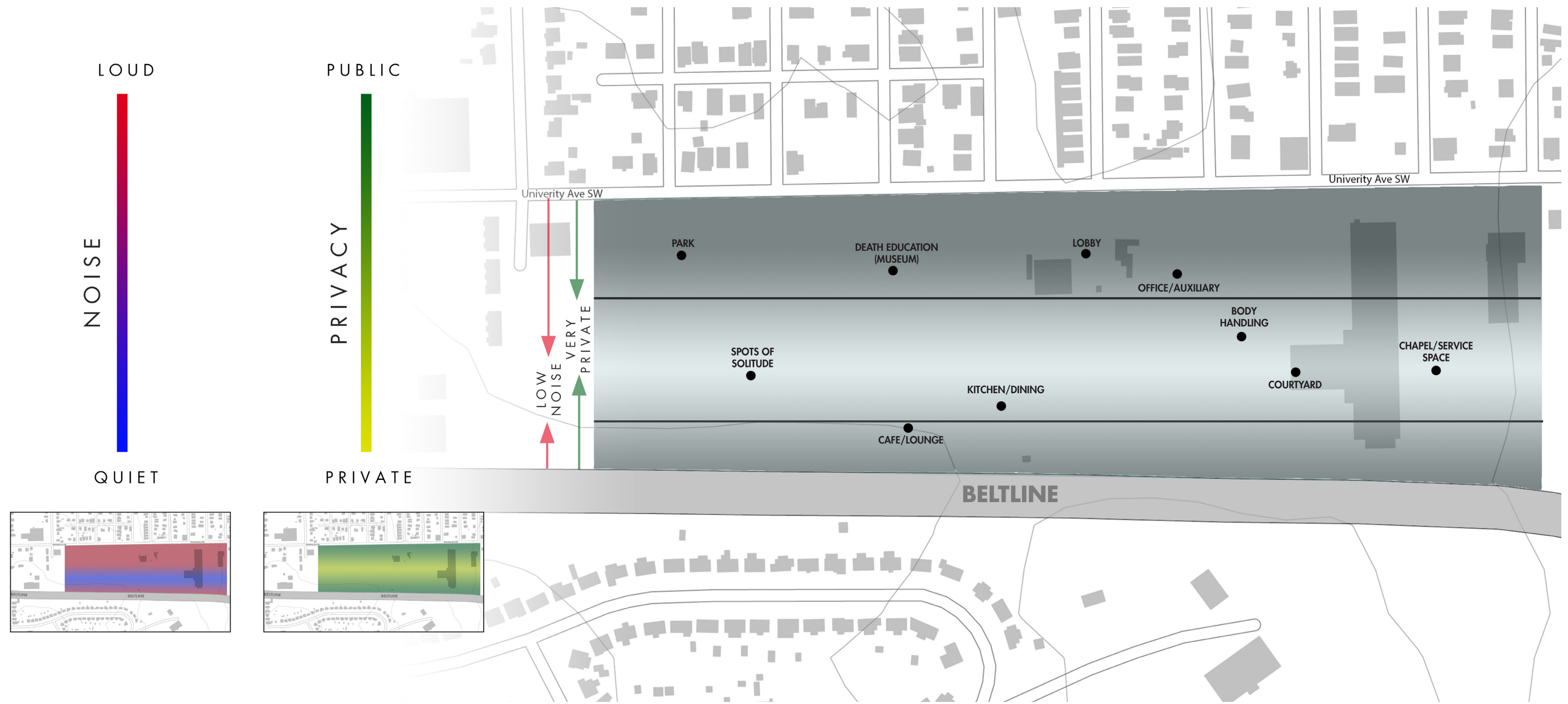
LOBBY

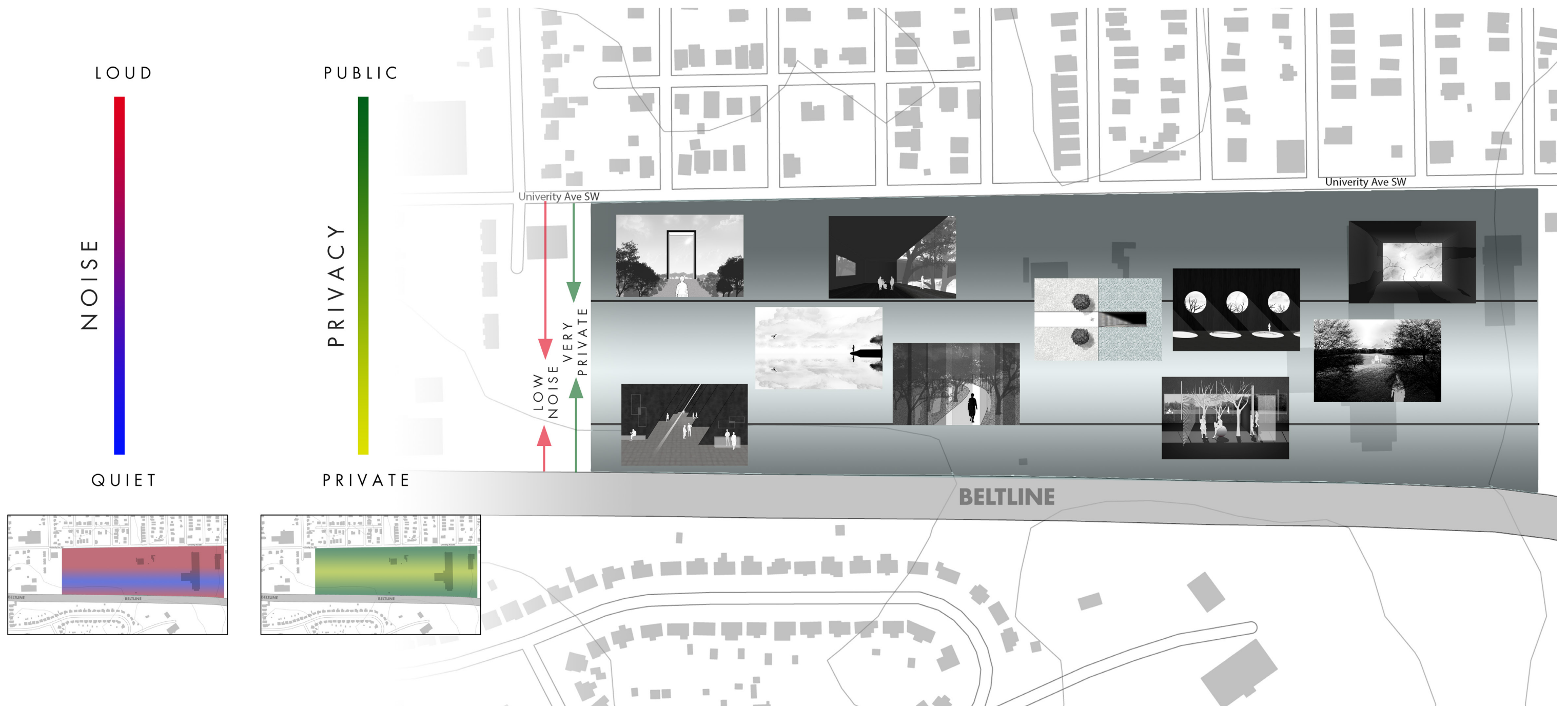




Finally, the images and programs were mapped along the site based on the parameters of noise and privacy, two factors that can greatly alter a sublime environment's effectiveness. There seemed to be a overall vertical gradient focused at the site's longitudinal center; the potential for quiet and private spaces is highest here. Placing these analyses within the confines of my site helps ground my research to a physical location and helps facilitate the beginnings of the design process.

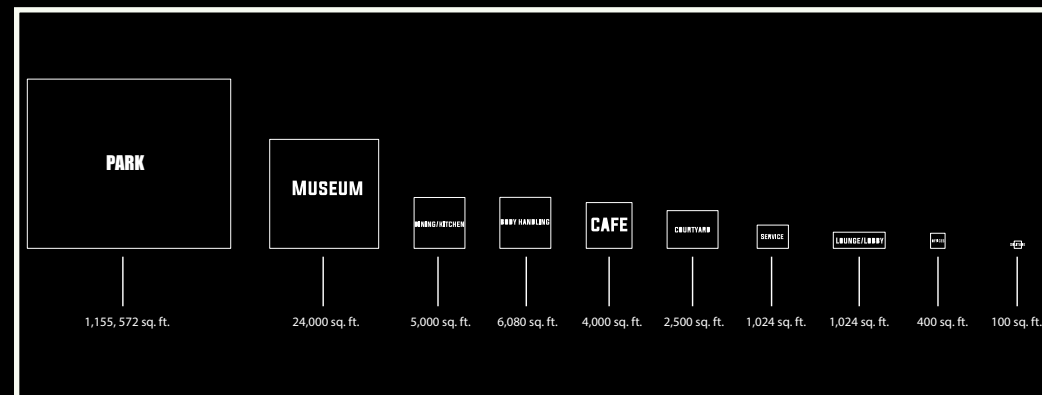






Plotting Vignettes

DESIGN



The design began by allocating space to each program. These range from the very public museum, to the very private "spots of solitude." The architecture of these spaces are simple in form and reserved in ornamentation as not to distract from their purpose of creating a targeted experience located along the sublime-beauty spectrum. By far the largest program is the park, spanning the entirety of the site at over two-million square feet. The park mixes memorial programs such as burial grounds and scattering gardens with recreational programs such as playgrounds and sculpture gardens as a means of giving life to areas of death, confronting the discomfort associated with cemeteries and mortality.

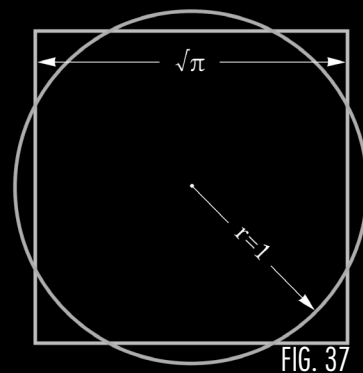


FIG. 37

The concept of "the circle in the square" is seen throughout the plan and references the ancient geometric impossibility of squaring a circle. This is representative of the impossible nature of death and the sublime while creating architectural forms that are powerful but not overbearing.





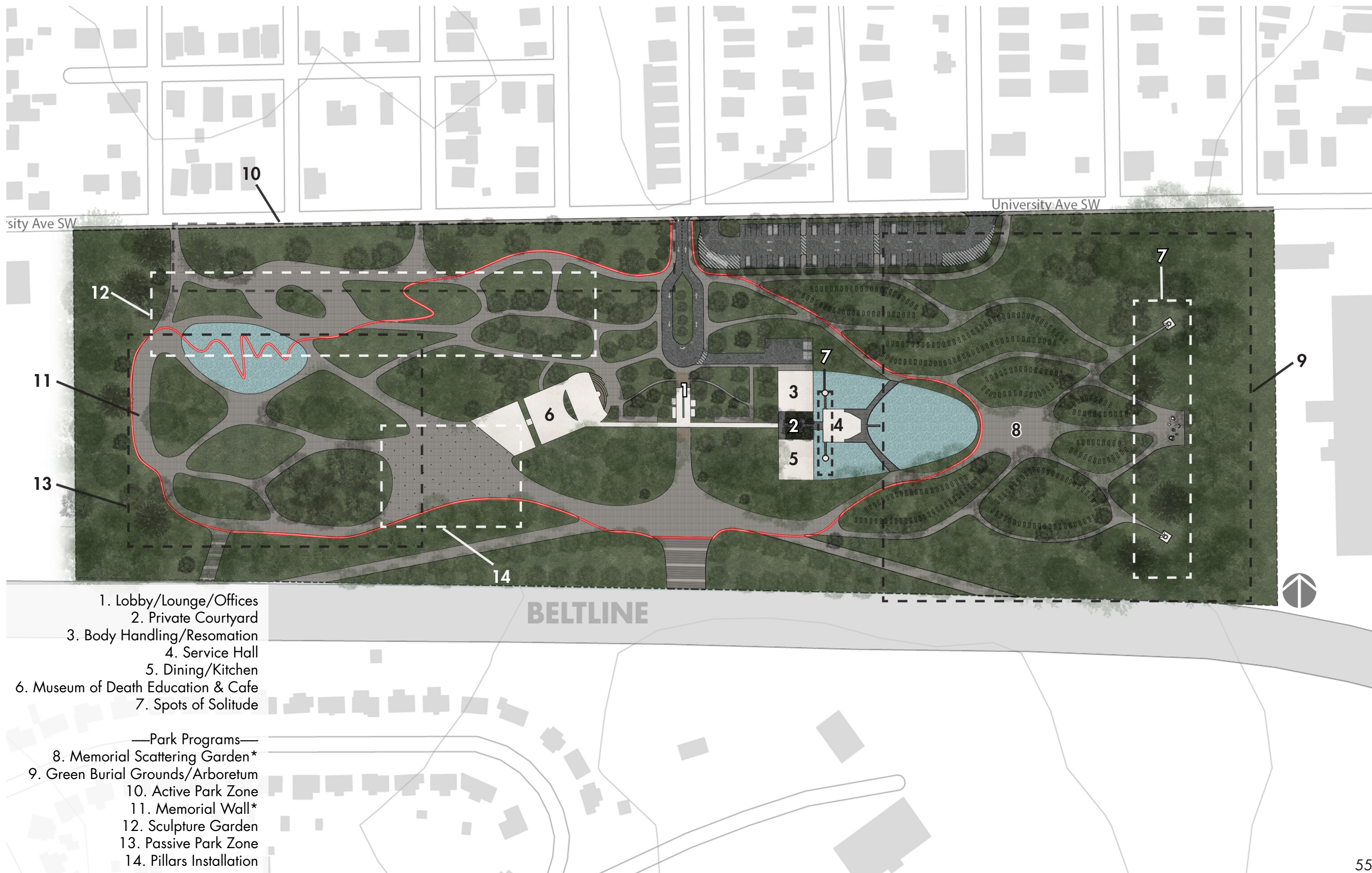
University Ave SW

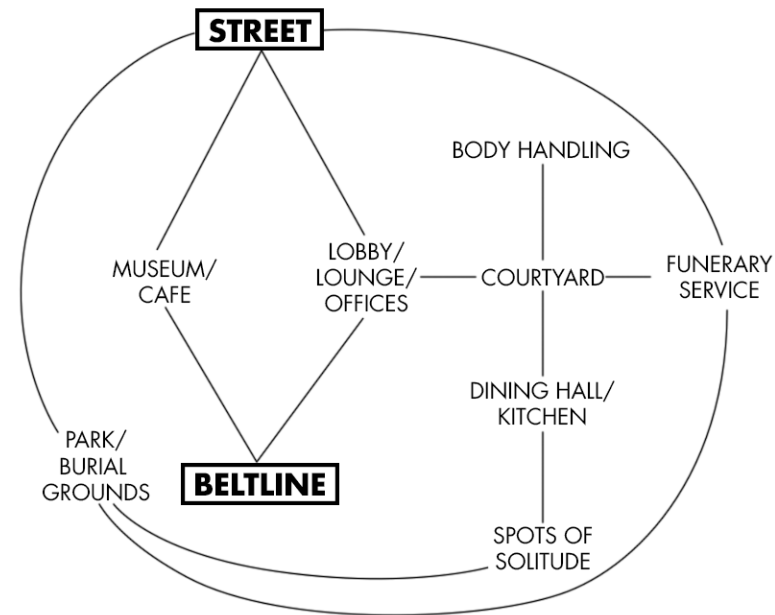
BELTLINE



Memento meMORlam has been designed using branching, curved paths, to create movement that is fluid and natural and parallels how people move throughout a space. There are non-linear pathways that provide a choice of movement through plazas and junctions that break and rematerialize into gathering spaces and plazas around major buildings and are more prevalent on the site's west side (public, recreation) than the east side (semi-private, burial grounds).

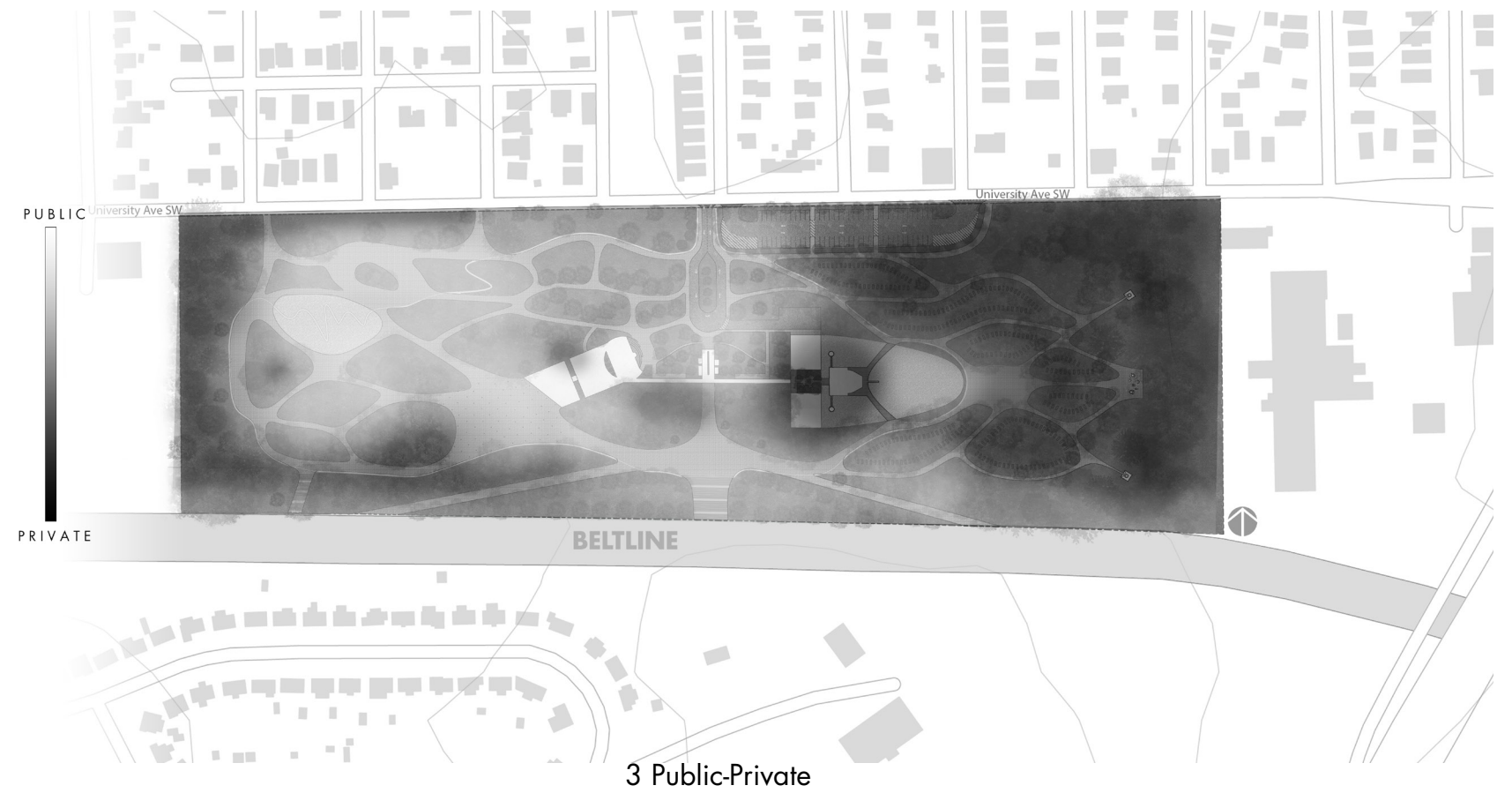
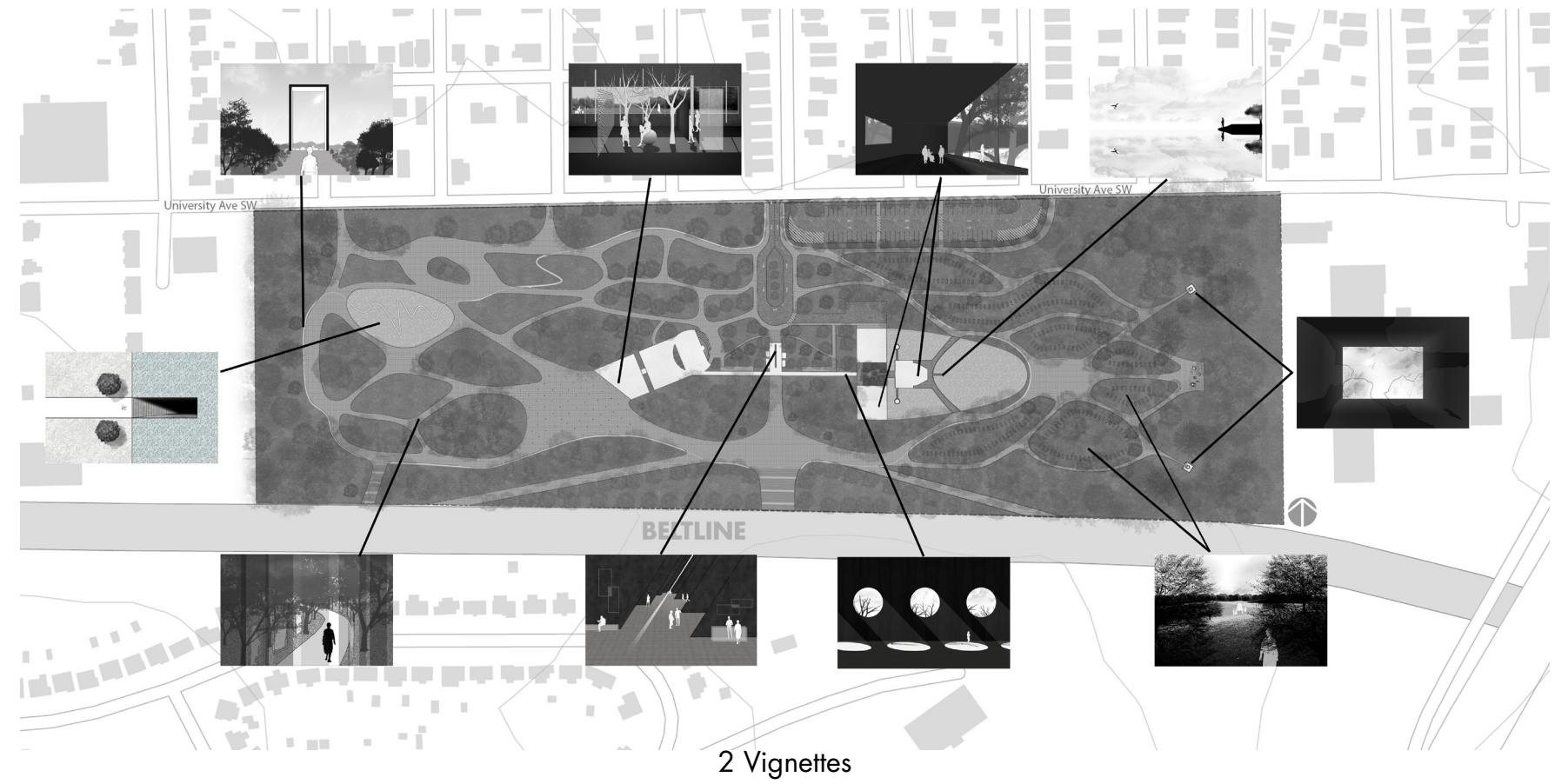
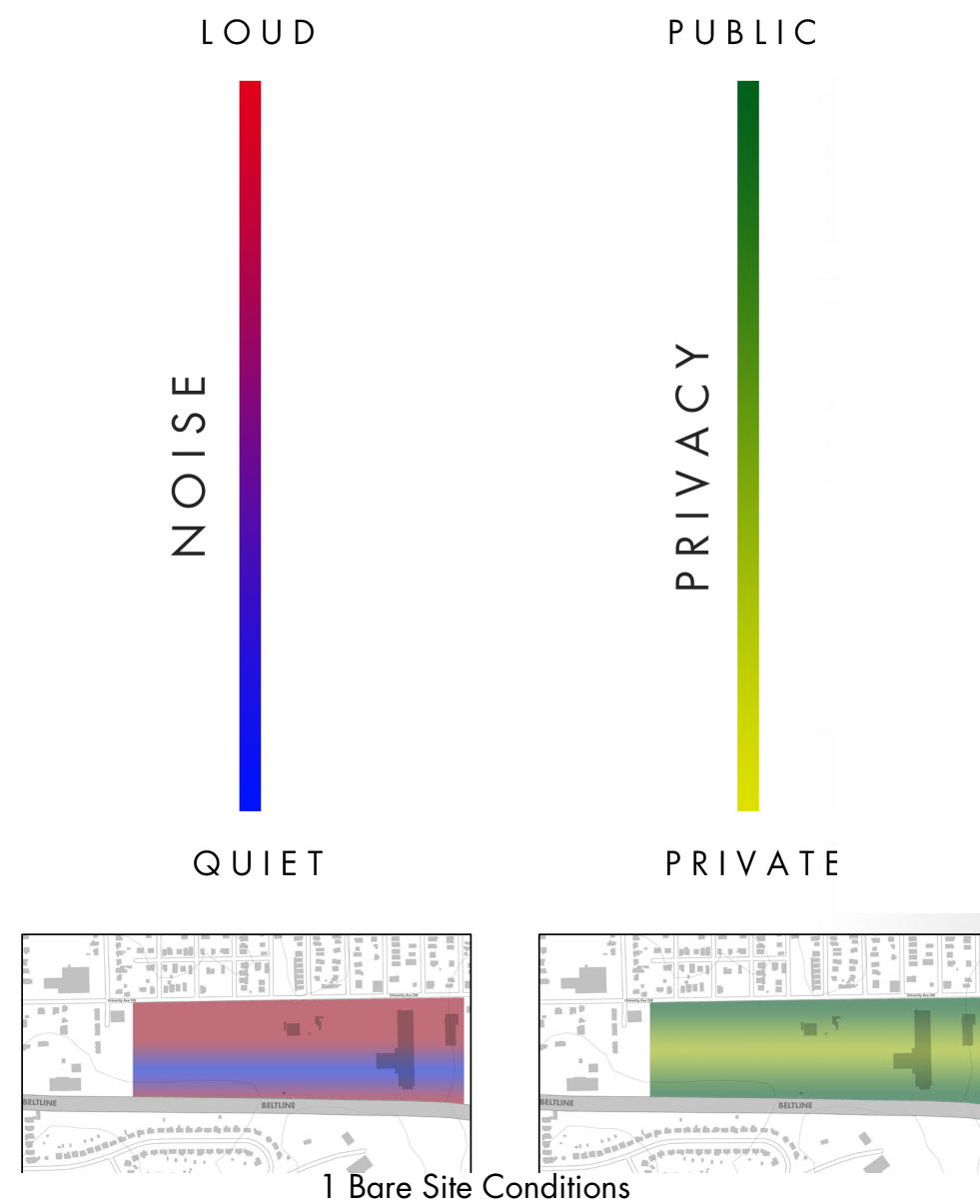
*There is also a sculptural element, a memorial thread, that runs around the entire site. It serves multiple functions: acting as seating on path edges but then sinking into the paving to helping guide visitors around the complex, while simultaneously functioning as memorial program markers: becoming a memorial wall at the western end and a memorial garden to the east.



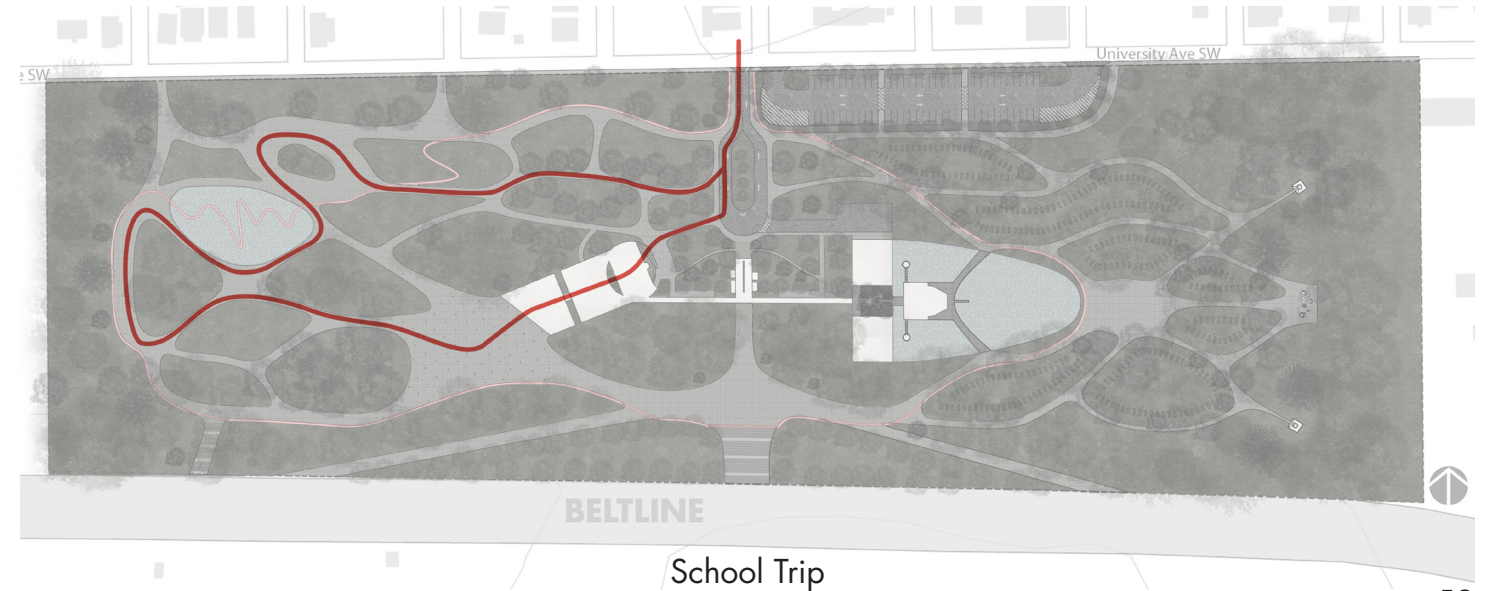
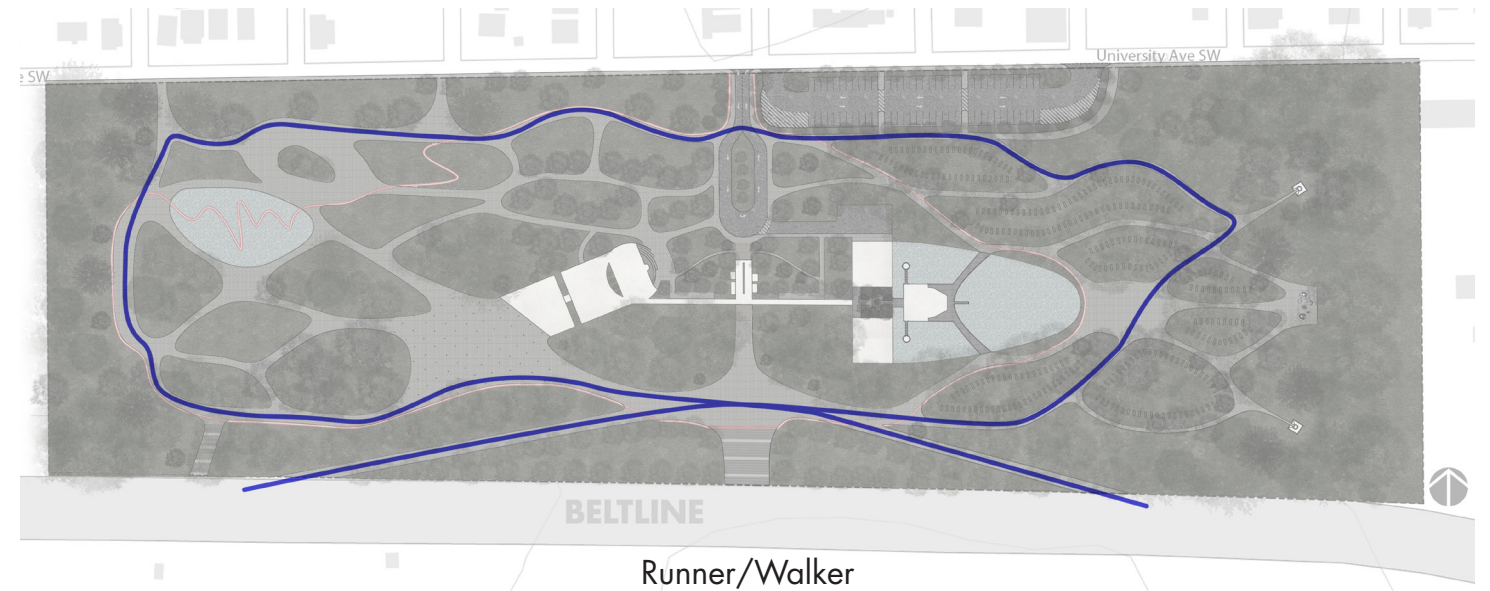
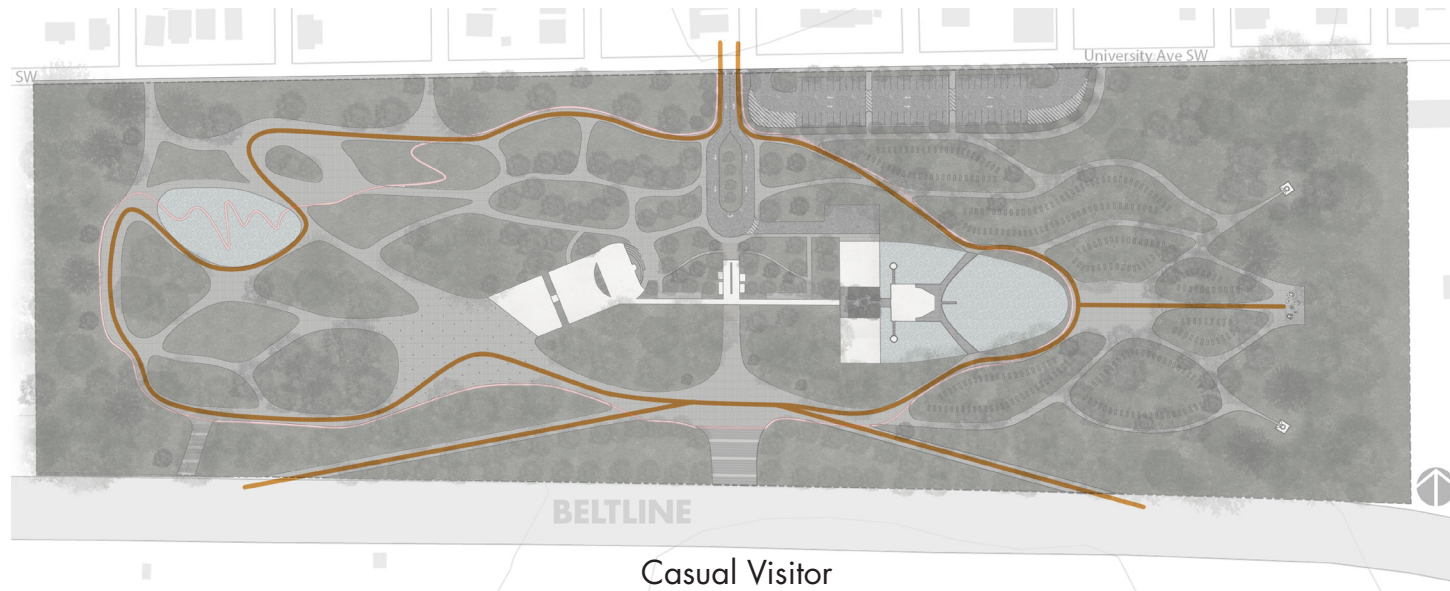
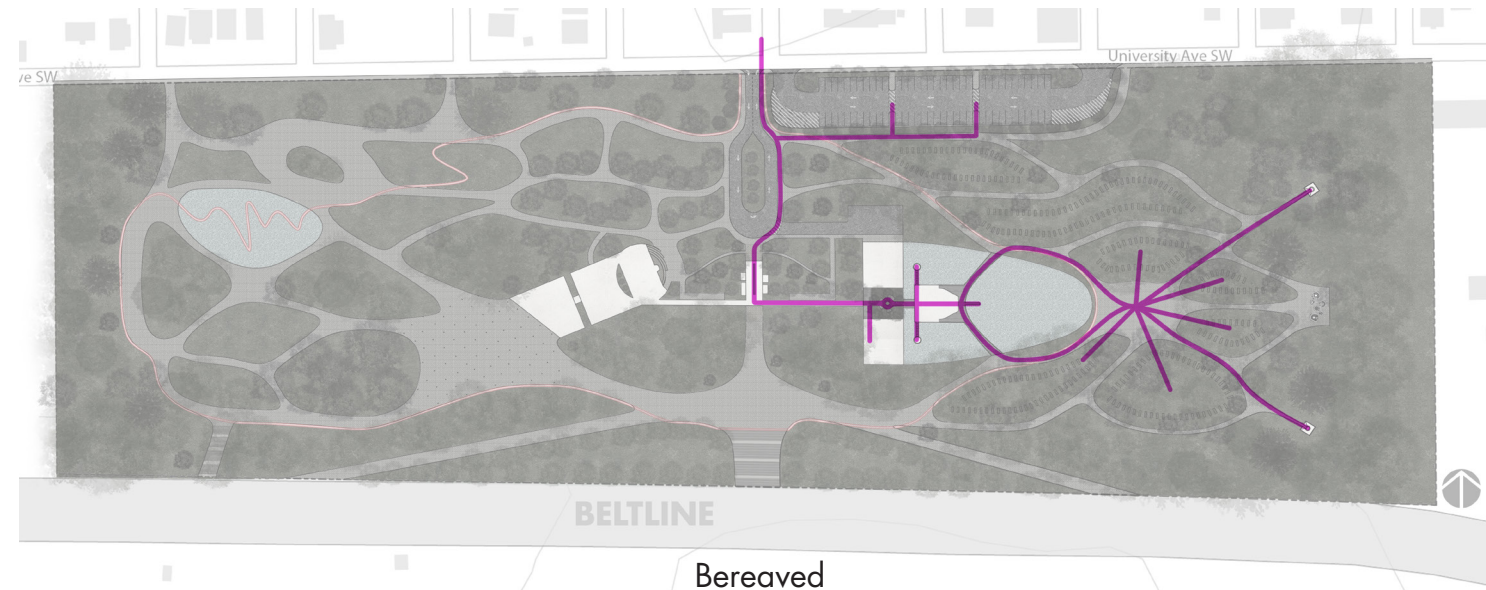


With the introduction of buildings and program, the relation between public and private becomes more representative of the site's real-life use. The public-private spectrum provided by this design is closer to the site edges than the center. This is the result of the generous tree canopy encircling most of the property in contrasts to the wide open park space.

By mapping the previous vignettes on the site, the sublime is introduced in the overall design. By comparing the mappings of the vignettes (2) and of the public/private locations (3) with those of the bare site conditions (1), we can start to see where these images begin to physically manifest themselves and how the architecture and landscape alters privacy boundaries.

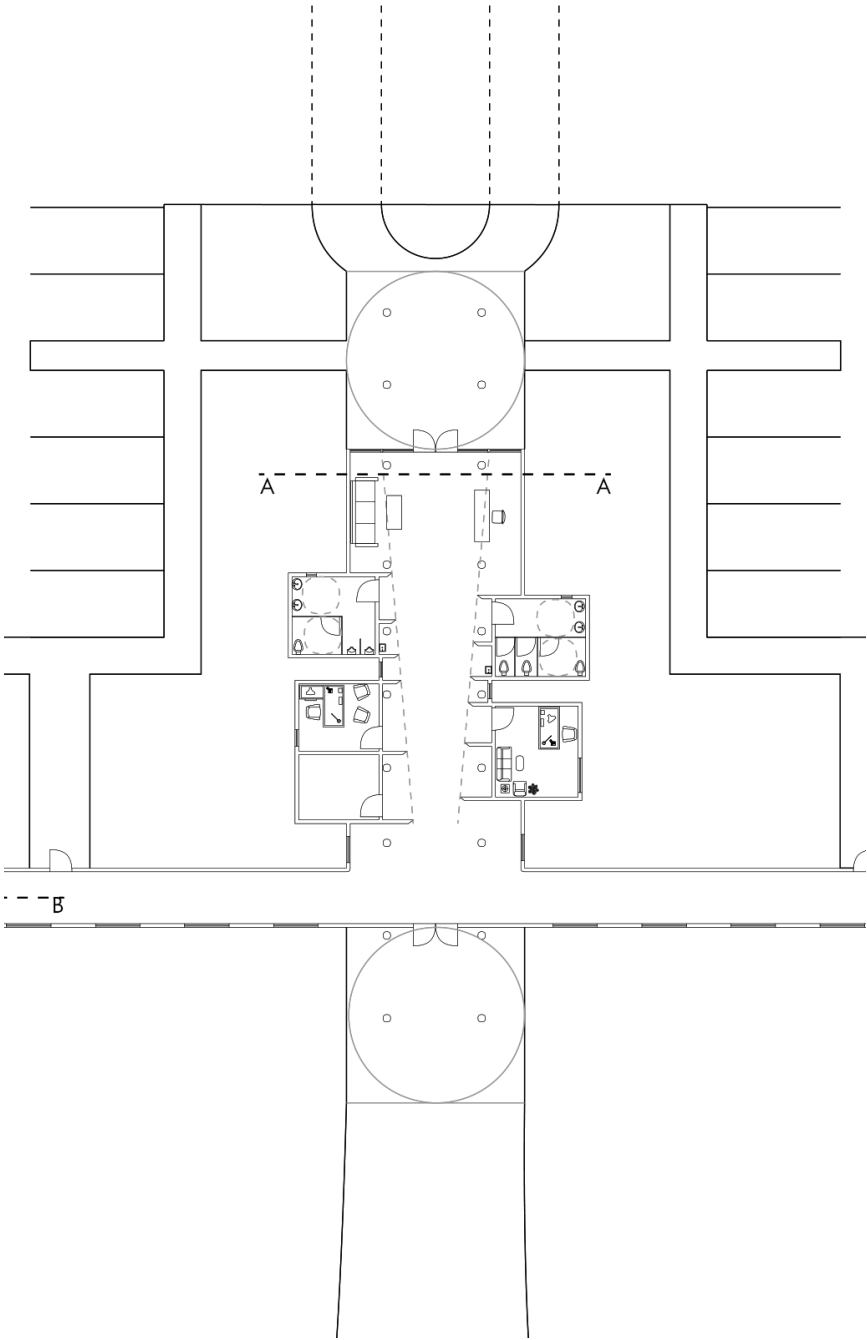
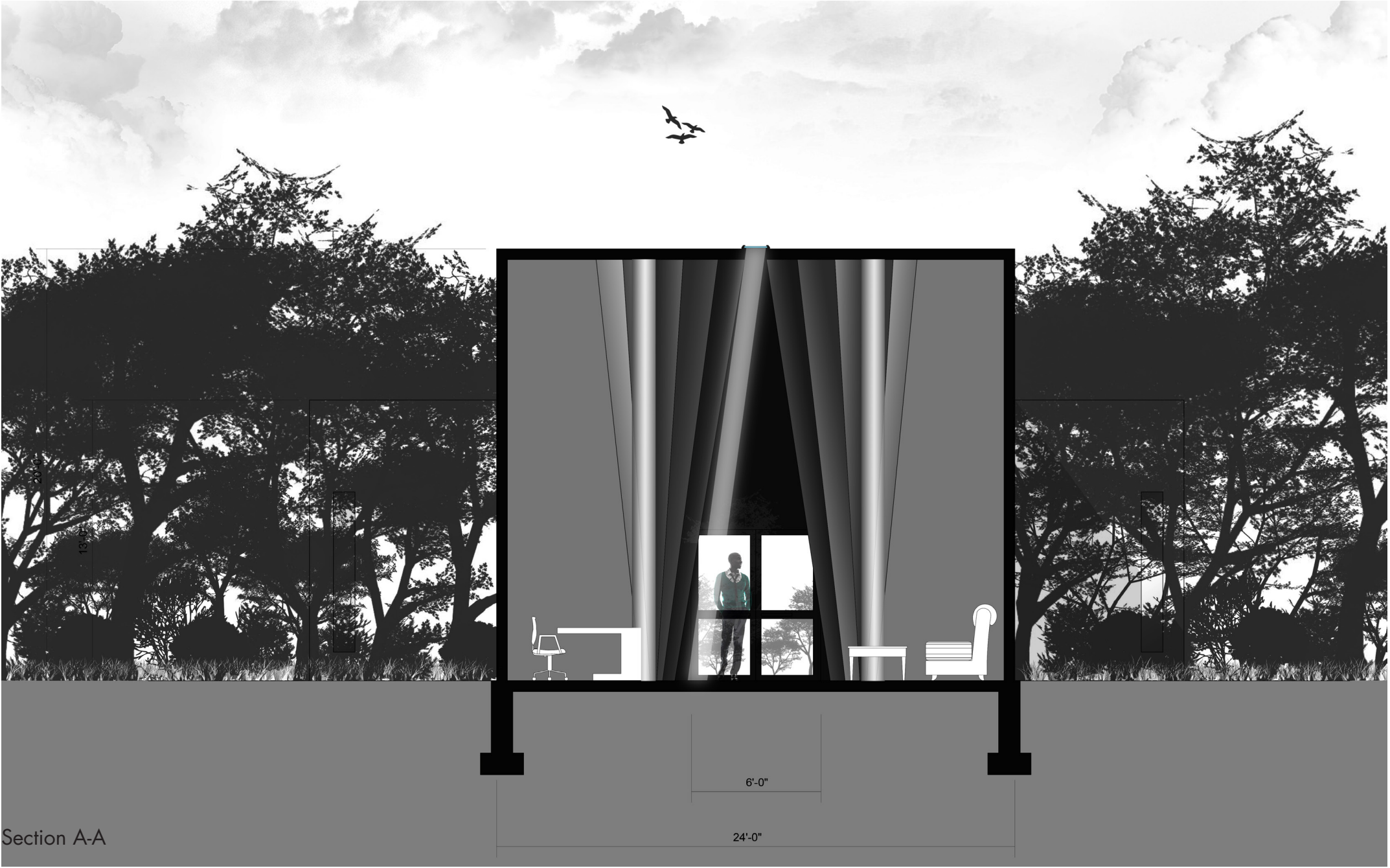


Movement through the site is meant to be fluid. One can experience the site in multiple, single moments or as a continuous unending path. The interplay of open and intimate spaces are at the heart of this thesis and dictate how the user experiences the sublime-beauty spectrum in relation to their movement through the site. This seeks to serve a multitude of different user groups, each with their own purpose and direction.



LOBBY

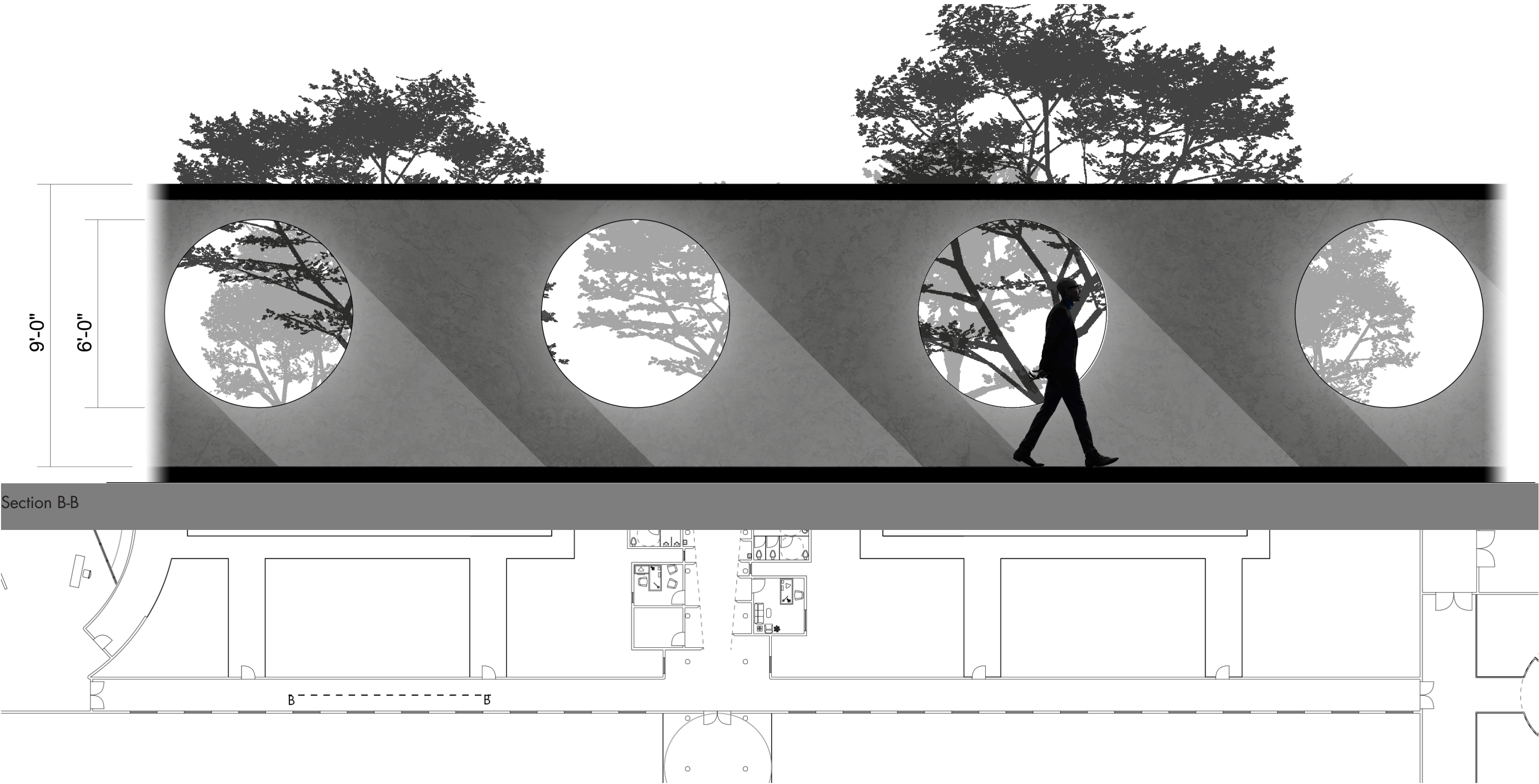
The lobby's long corridor condition funnels the visitor in and the alternating, tilted walls appear to be closing in. Along this path is a thin skylight illuminating the path and creating a sensation that is both jarring and reassuring.





HALLWAY

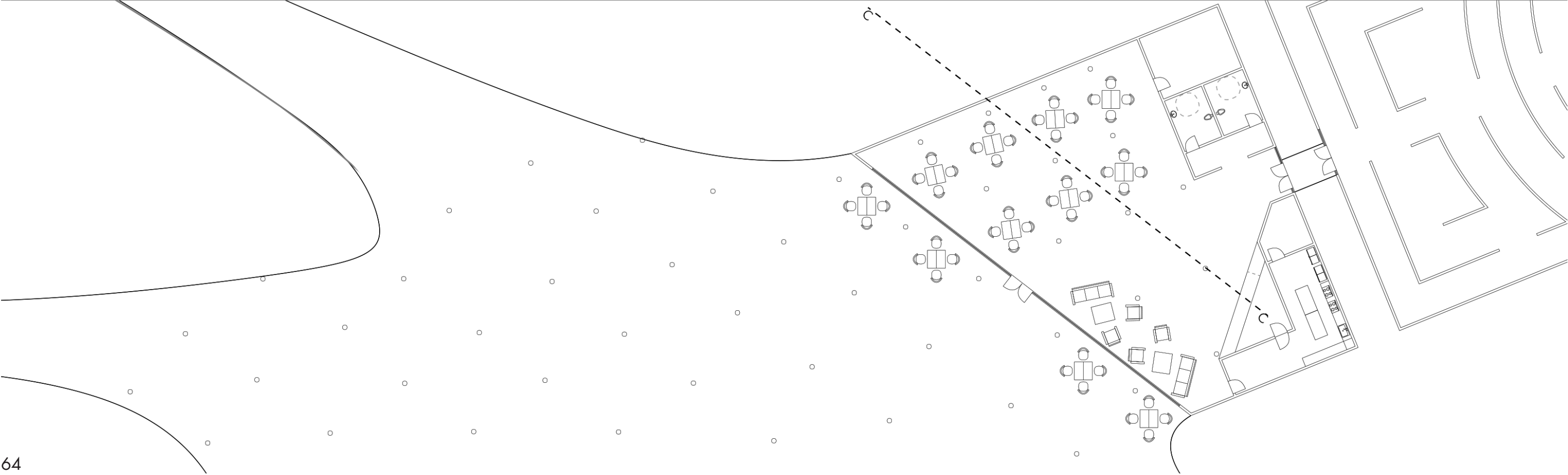
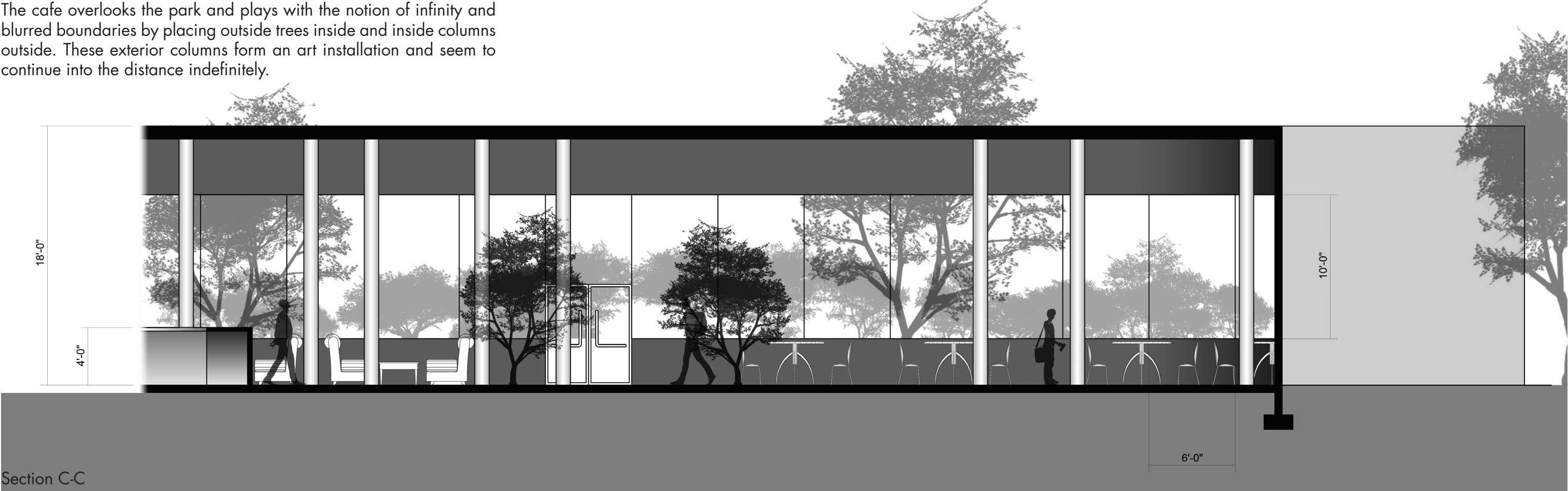
The hallways leading from the lobby to the museum and the courtyard are narrow, dimly lit passages punctuated with circular windows that provide a distinct rhythm of light. This tunnel-like condition echoes sound and coerces the visitor be mindful of their volume and movement as the approach the next building.

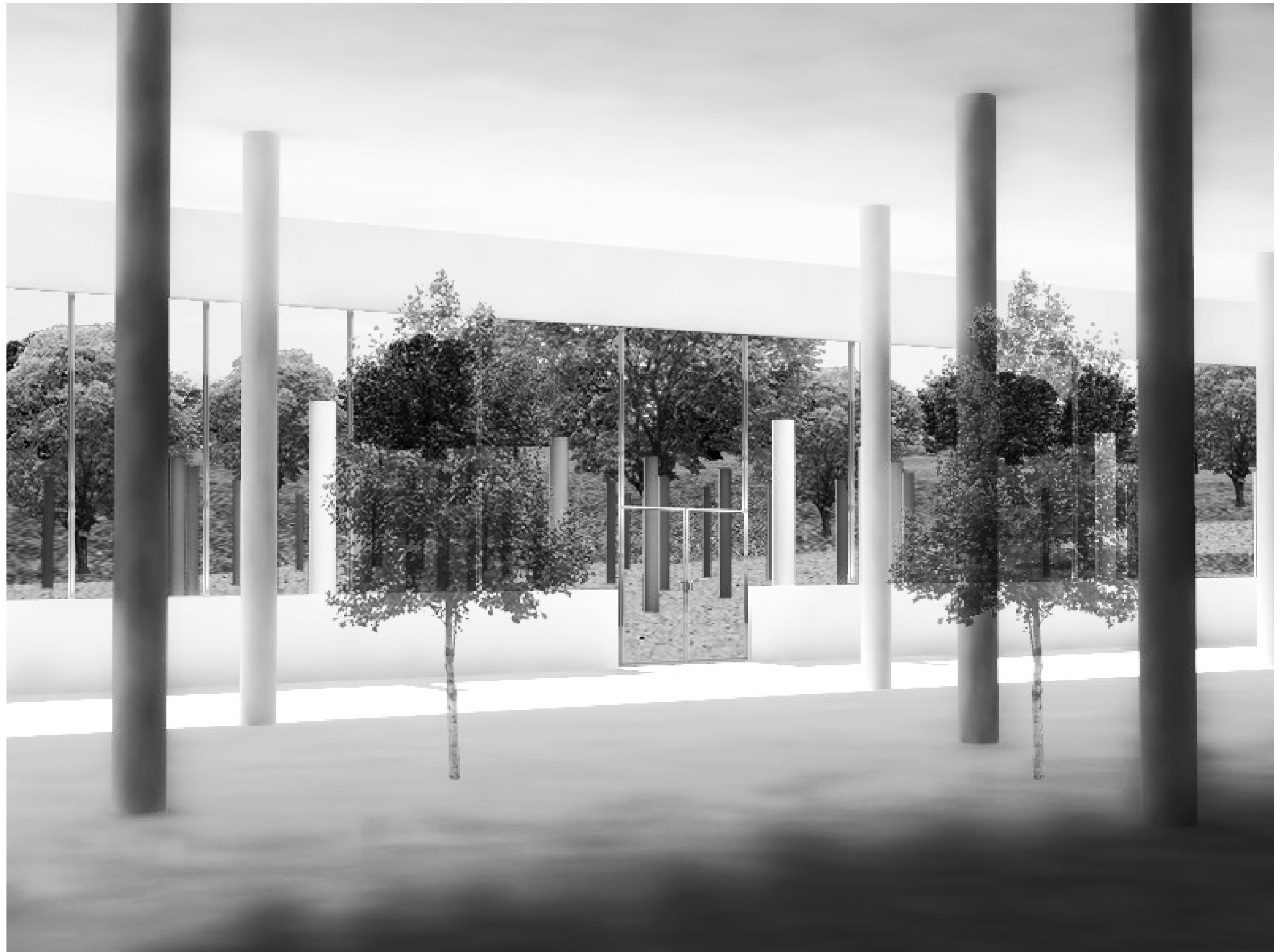




CAFE

The cafe overlooks the park and plays with the notion of infinity and blurred boundaries by placing outside trees inside and inside columns outside. These exterior columns form an art installation and seem to continue into the distance indefinitely.





COURTYARD

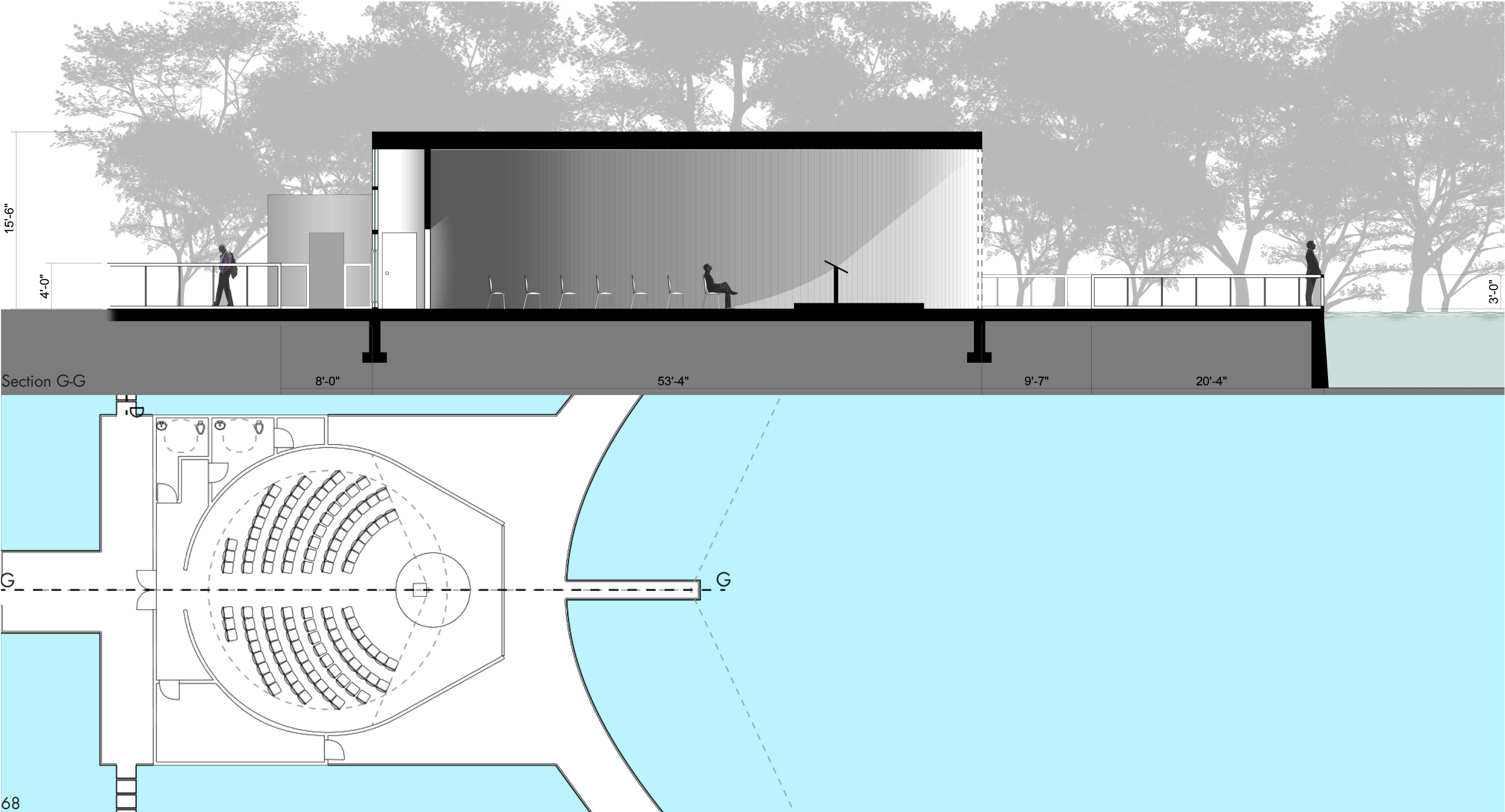
The courtyard acts as a hub for the programs related to burial and bereavement. From here, one has access to the body handling mortuary, the service hall and the dining space. The pathways are elevated above the ground to give the visitor the sensation of walking amongst the trees, floating above the ground.





SERVICE HALL

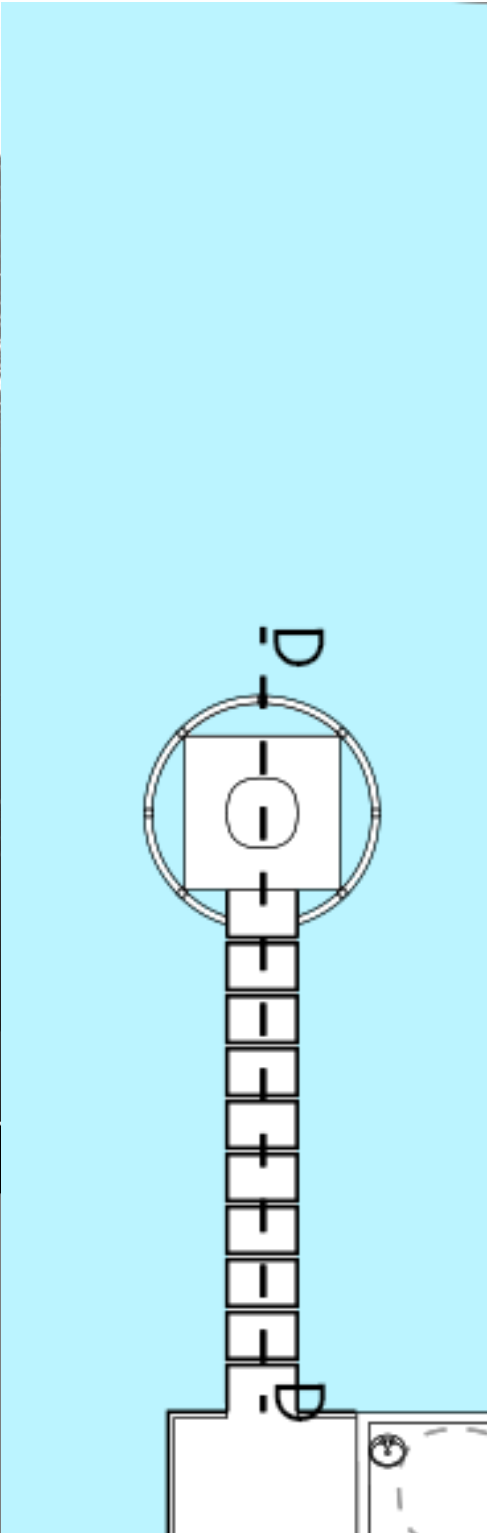
The service hall is a fairly simple space with chairs arrayed in a radial formation facing a raised podium. Behind the podium is a movable wall that opens onto the lake. On this lake is a small pier that allows the visitor to ponder the reflections in the water and sequester themselves momentarily.

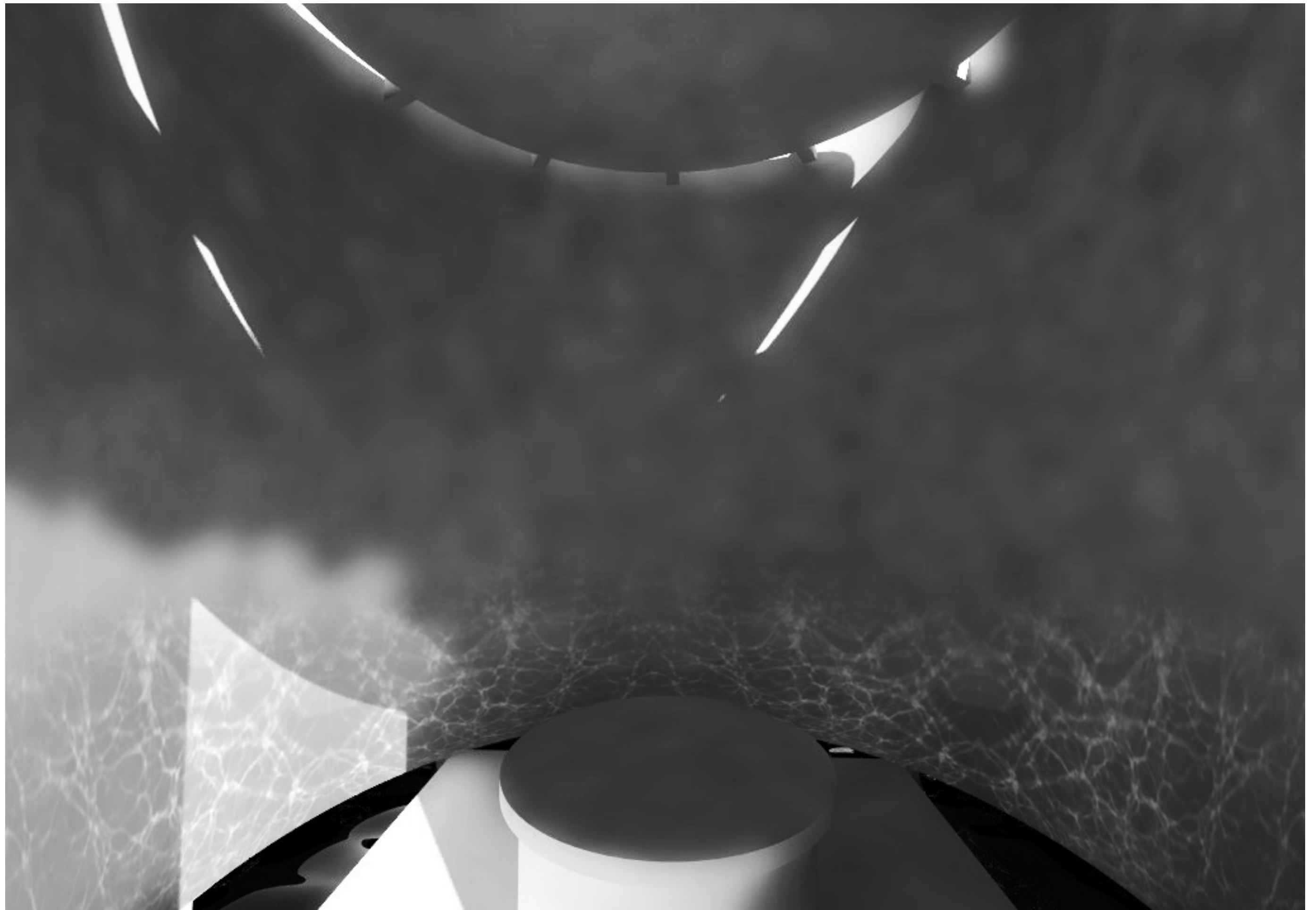




SPOT OF SOLITUDE

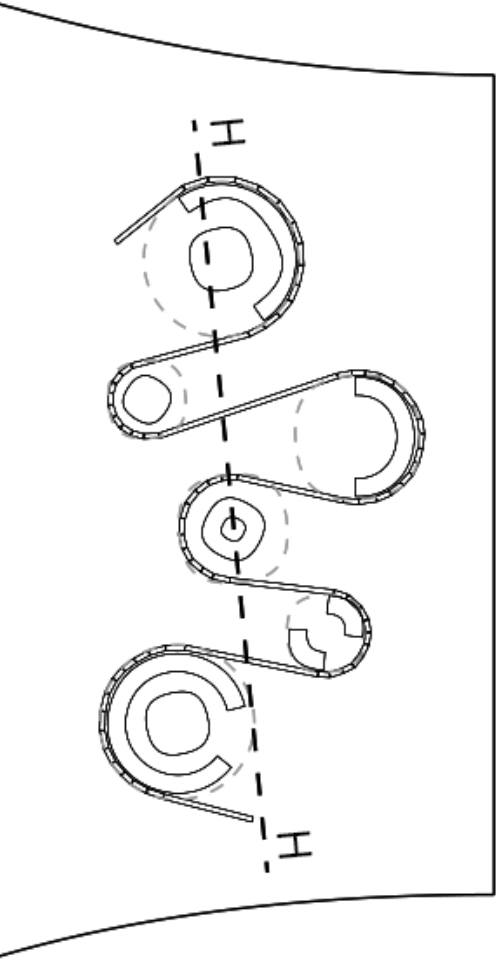
The spots of solitude flanking the service hall are small cylindrical enclosures that sit on top of the water. A play of light on the walls is caused both by the movement of the water below and the slits cut into the roof above. They are accessed by a stepping-stone path atop the water.

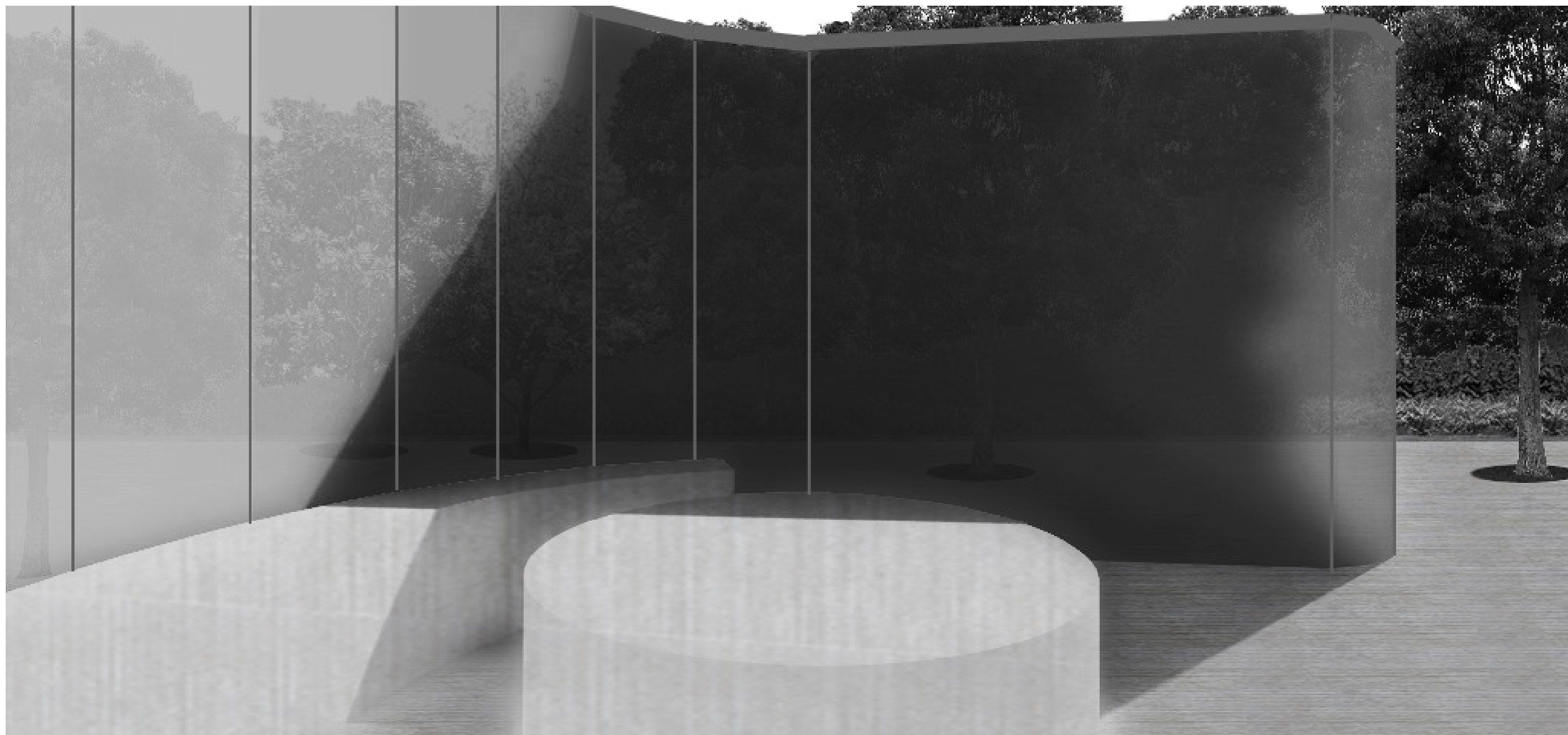




SPOT OF SOLITUDE

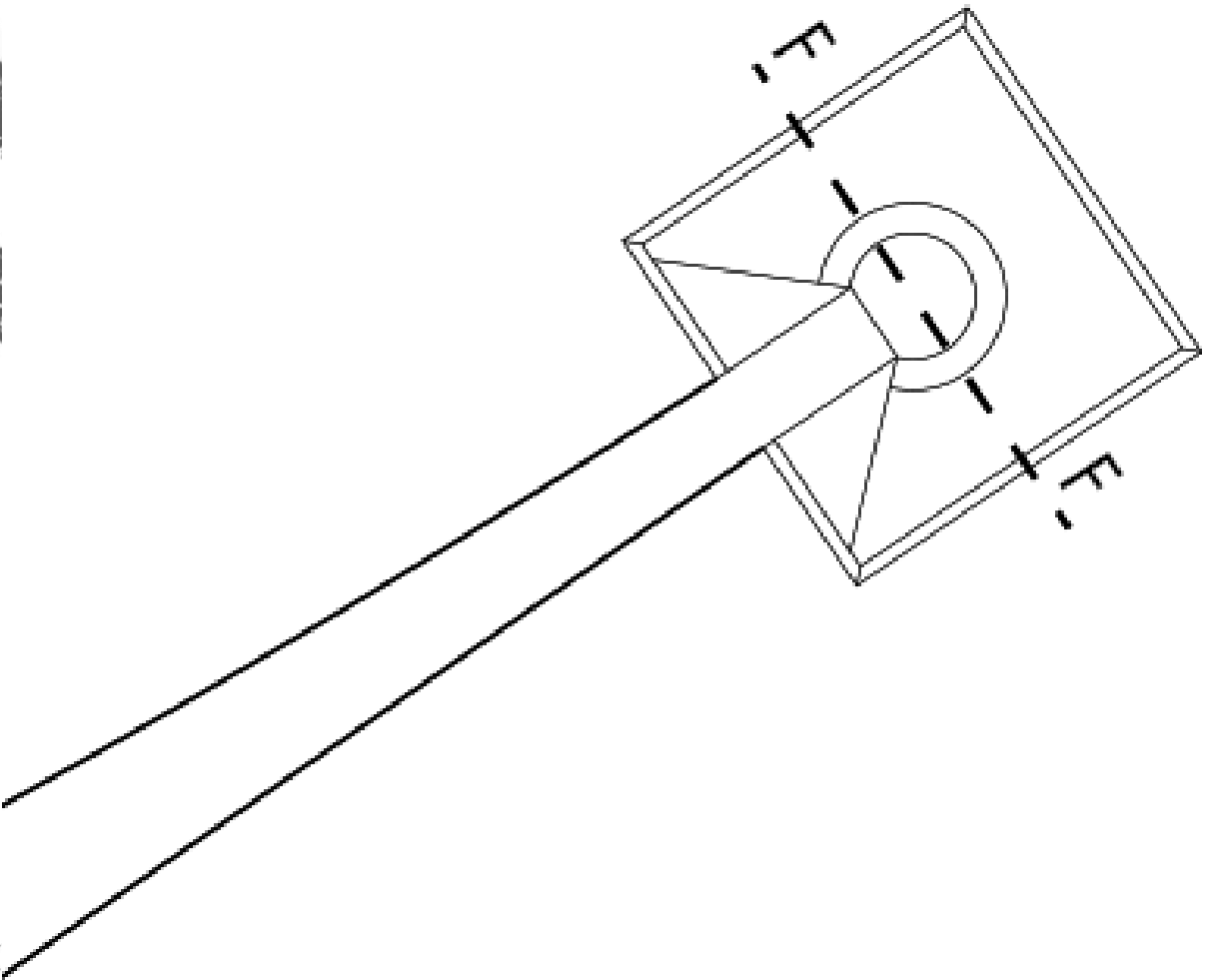
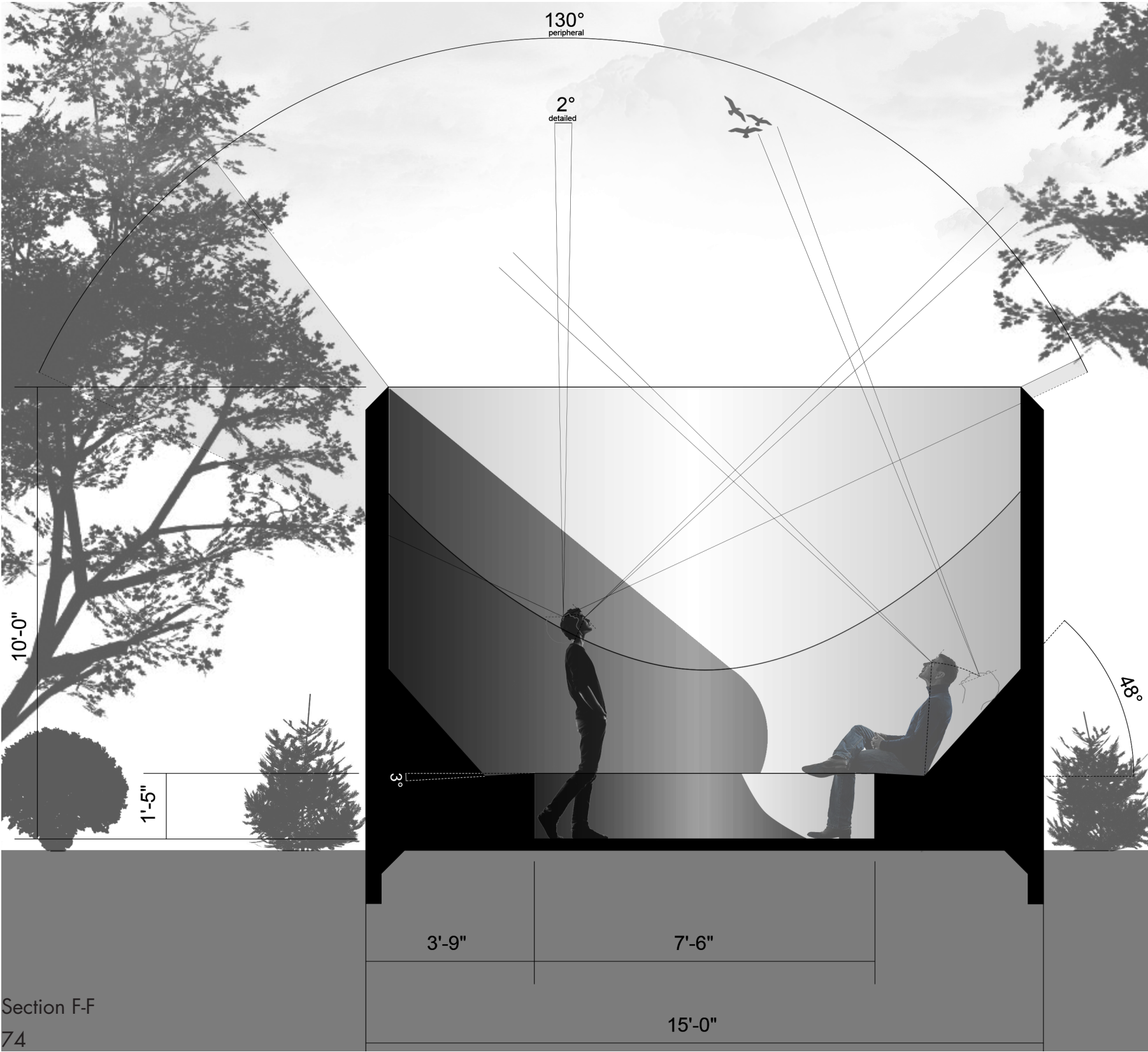
The spot of solitude located on the eastern end of the site is designed for groups of individuals that wish to be alone, but not isolated. The translucent channel-glass walls limit views and display silhouette movements of people and dappled light from surrounding trees.





SPOT OF SOLITUDE

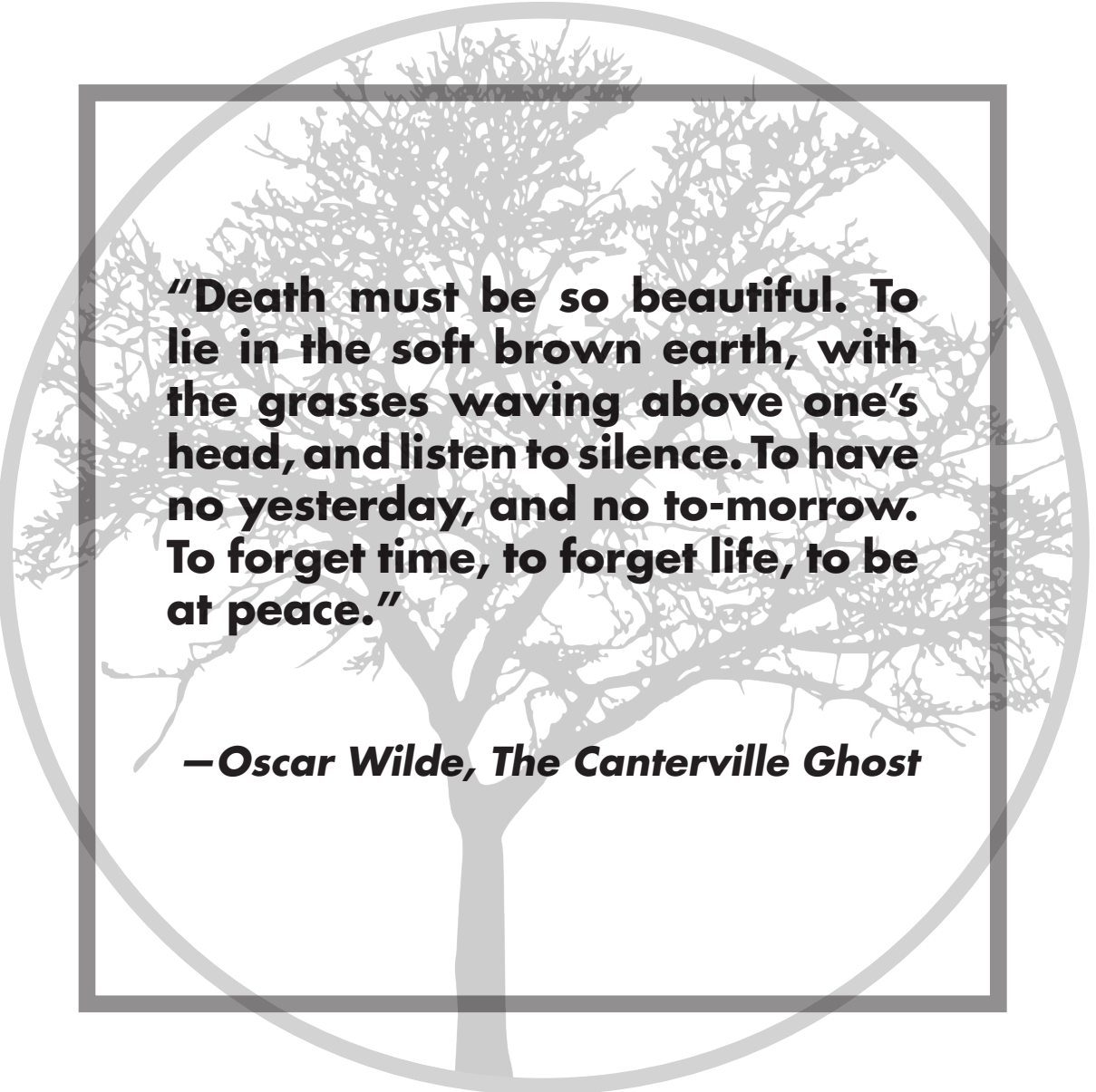
The spots of solitude at the northeast and southeast corners of the site are simple concrete cubes with wooden seating. The roofless design, tapered wall edges and reclined seating provide a framed view of the sky and promotes contemplation and self-reflection.





Grief is a spectrum and this thesis aims to address this by creating an environment that allows us to confront the intricacies of death. Like our changing society, the customs and rituals surrounding the dead continually endure change and this thesis ultimately acts as a structural critique of the industry through an architecture lens. The emotional burden, the physical act of burying, the sudden financial strains, and the social distancing death causes seem almost unavoidable for many in the modern world.

However, this thesis suggests these difficulties can be managed and confronted by addressing these issues in a manner that caters to the varying ways in which we grieve. It allows us to take charge of our dead and how they're handled, but also take time for ourselves and acknowledge our own feelings. It puts death in the forefront of our lives, instead of in the back. After all, how we die reflects how we live and how we treat our dead reflects how we treat our living. This is why this project is called "MEMENTO meMORiam; it recalls the universal truth of "remember that we must die", and that there is a better way to do it.



"Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses waving above one's head, and listen to silence. To have no yesterday, and no to-morrow. To forget time, to forget life, to be at peace."

—Oscar Wilde, *The Canterville Ghost*

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IMAGE CREDITS

FIG. 01 <https://www.louisianapersonalinjurylawyerblog.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/310/2017/03/graves-1-1504523.jpg>
FIG. 02 <http://www.obaasima.com/creepy-dead-trees-black-and-white-wallpapers-picture/>
FIG. 03 <http://green-city.su/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/3cremation.jpg>
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FIG. 36 <http://fcaofmn.org/uploads/3/4/7/5/34750124/4423783.png?431>
FIG. 37 <https://worshipandliturgysustm.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/lone-tree-1117616.jpg>

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